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# HISTORY of WAR

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Uncover the truth behind Nazi Germany's celebrated panzer leader, and the blunder that spelled his doom

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Did the British Army teach Washington to fight?

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FUTURE
ISSUE 104

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# KING & COUNTRY
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IDF036-1
*Syrian Army T-55A Main Battle Tank*

IDF028
*General Ariel 'Arik' Sharon*

IDF001
*General Moshe Dayan*

K&C's latest release includes: *2 x Syrian Army T54/55s* in their distinctive camouflage patterns as well as a pair of unfortunate tank crew casualties.

**On 6 October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a joint attack on Israel. In the south, Egyptian forces successfully crossed the Suez Canal before assaulting and capturing the Israeli defence line on the opposite bank of the canal first built by them after the 1967 *'Six Day War'*.**

To the north, huge Syrian tanks formations advanced on the *Golan Heights* and threatened Israel itself. All of this on the most holy day of the Jewish calendar... *'Yom Kippur'*.

# Valley of Tears

IDF037 *Two Syrian Tank Casualties*

On the *Golan Heights* two understrength Israeli tank brigades *(just 170 tanks)* faced more than *1200* modern Syrian T54/55 tanks in a series of fiercesome armour battles that left both sides badly-bruised.

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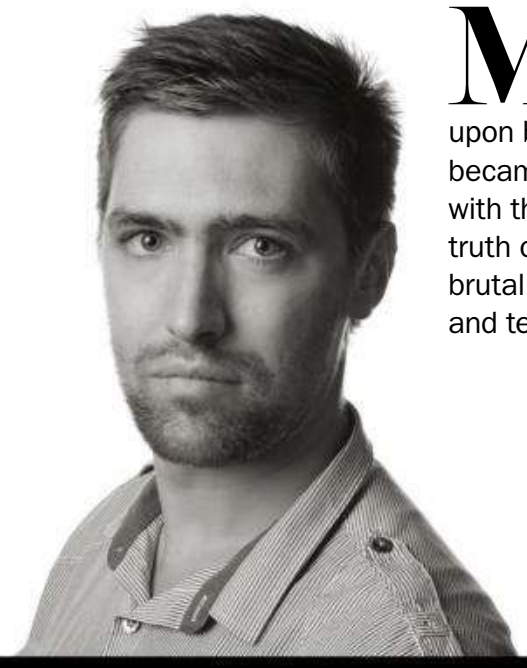
# Welcome



Michael Wittmann's success during the Battle of Normandy went against the grain of repeated German disasters in the east and west. His story was seized upon by a public desperate for a heroic figure, and his feats became mythologised and likened to the legendary Richthofen, with the epithet 'Black Baron'. Though historians still debate the truth of Wittmann's battlefield prowess, his story echoes the brutal realities of armoured warfare on both fronts, where tactics and technology were the difference between life and death.

**Tim Williamson**
Editor-in-Chief

***Above:** Adolf Hitler presents Wittmann with the Eichenlauben (Oakleaves) to his Knight's Cross, 1944*

## CONTRIBUTORS

**JONATHAN TRIGG**
Jonathan is a former British Army officer turned historian of the Second World War and the Wehrmacht. Over on page 24 he recounts the story of Michael Wittmann, whom Nazi propagandists dubbed the 'Black Baron'.

**DAVID SMITH**
David is an historian specialising in American military history, including the War of Independence and Civil War. On page 42 he discusses how George Washington used his experience in the British Army to help win the American Revolution.

**WILLIAM SHEPHERD**
William is an historian and author of several books on the Greco-Persian wars. Over on page 56 he recounts the critical Battle of Plataea, 479 BCE, which finally halted Xerxes' invasion of the Greek city states.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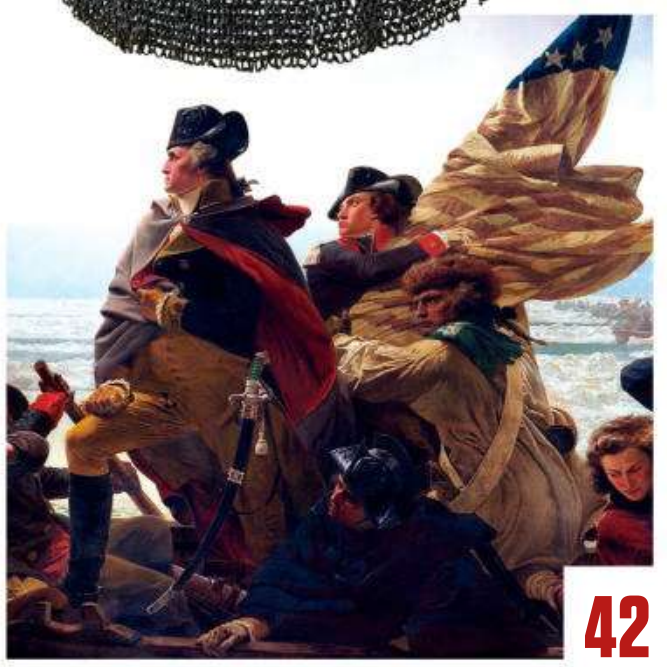

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A decorative Colt Dragoon revolver

© Getty

WAR in FOCUS

# TO THE VICTORS, THE BEERS!

***September 1918***

A group of American soldiers raise beer mugs at a captured German canteen, Saint-Mihiel, France. The Battle of Saint-Mihiel (12-15 September) involved French and US troops, and was led by General John J Pershing. The Allied offensive was the first major operation of the American Expeditionary Forces acting independent of foreign command. The attack aimed to cut off a salient in the German frontline, between Verdun and Nancy. The battle also featured two future WWII generals, George S Patton and Douglas MacArthur.

WAR in FOCUS

# TAKING AIM

***c.May 1970***

A self-propelled artillery piece belonging to 2nd Battalion 94th Field Artillery, pictured at Camp Carroll, Vietnam. Named after Captain James J Carroll of the US Marine Corps, Camp Carroll was a key artillery base just south of the demilitarised zone between north and south Vietnam.

© Getty

A7
HULL DRAIN
U.S. ARMY
12GT26

© Getty

WAR in FOCUS

## POLITICAL BOMBSHELL

***1940***

Members of Britain's House of Commons Defence Committee observe personnel from the Home Guard practising how to throw grenades, during their visit to a training camp. In May 1940, the appeal was made for all men aged between 17 and 65 to join what was initially called the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV), which was later renamed the Home Guard. Over 1.5 million joined up within months of the appeal.

TIMELINE OF THE...

# PACIFIC THEATRE

Japan's pre-war expansion and shock attacks on the US put the Allies on the back foot, leading to a long & bloody struggle across the world's largest ocean

## SURPRISE STRIKE

As well as attacking Pearl Harbor, the US naval base in Hawaii, Japan also launches offensives against the Philippines, Wake Island, Guam, Malaya, Thailand, Shanghai and Midway. The invasion of the Philippines commences with the bombing of airfields on Luzon island, followed by amphibious landings, which quickly overwhelm Filipino and US forces.

© Getty

**7-11 December 1941**

**1931-41**

© Alamy

## JAPAN'S EXPANSION

Prior to its attacks into the Pacific region, Japan invades mainland China, beginning with the occupation of Manchuria in 1931. In 1940 Japan invades Indochina, setting the stage for its push south and east into the Pacific islands.

*Japanese troops in Manchuria after the successful occupation*

**17 December 1941 – 8 March 1942**

## INVASION OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIES 01

Japan begins its offensive against the Dutch East Indies shortly after the Netherlands declares war on 8 December. An amphibious invasion of Celebes is carried out on the night of 10-11 January, and by late February Java is invaded after the Allied defeat at the Battle of the Java Sea.

*Burning petrol dumps, set alight by the retreating Dutch forces, Java, c.1942*

© Alamy

**15 February 1942**

## FALL OF SINGAPORE

After a largely disastrous fighting retreat from the advancing Japanese invasion, the British garrison in Singapore officially surrenders, resulting in around 130,000 Allied soldiers being taken prisoner. Churchill calls the loss of Singapore the "worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history".

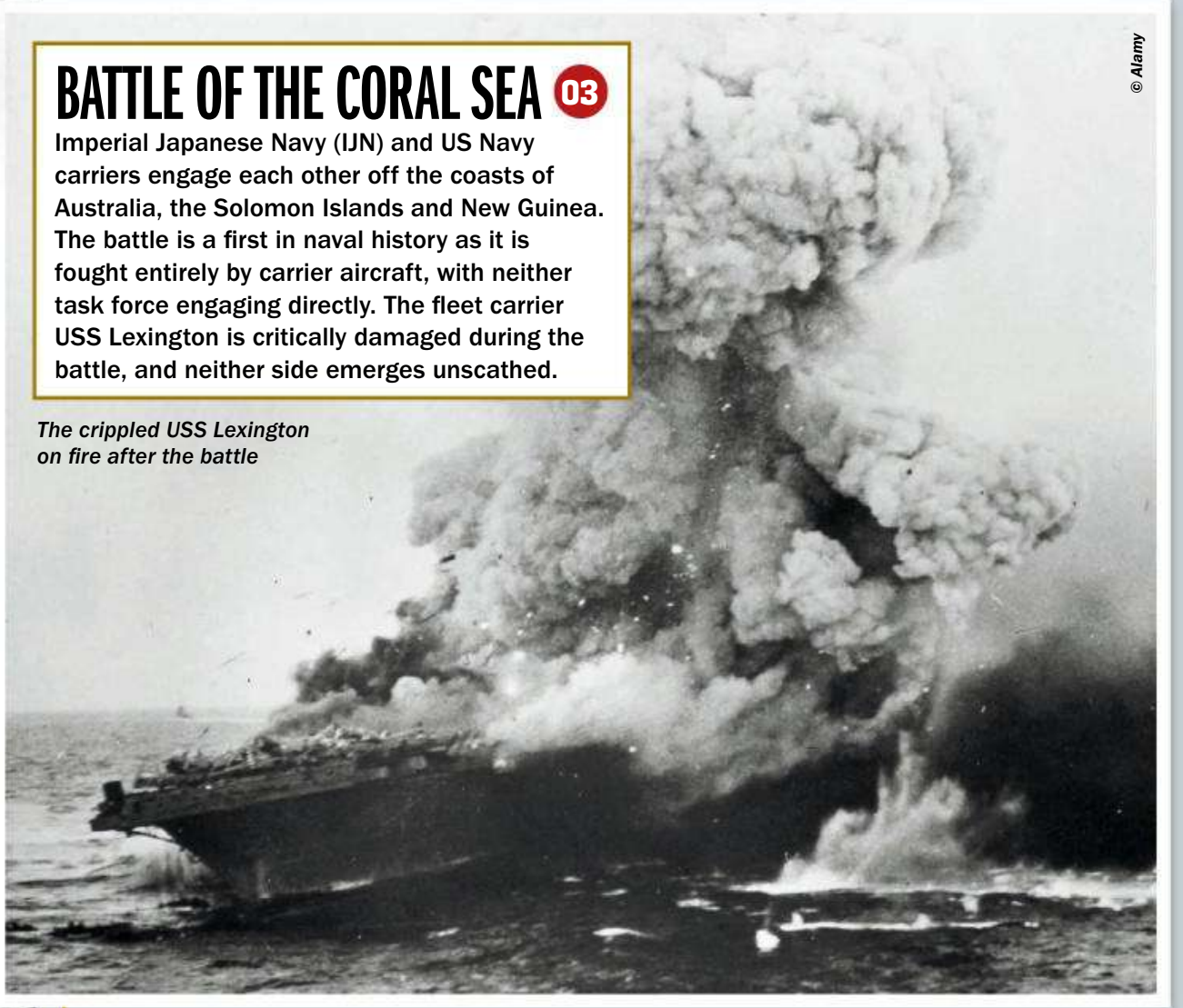
*Allied soldiers are taken prisoner after the surrender of Singapore*

© Getty

*Japanese troops advance with armoured support in the Philippines*

## BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA 03

**Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) and US Navy carriers engage each other off the coasts of Australia, the Solomon Islands and New Guinea. The battle is a first in naval history as it is fought entirely by carrier aircraft, with neither task force engaging directly. The fleet carrier USS Lexington is critically damaged during the battle, and neither side emerges unscathed.**



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*The crippled USS Lexington on fire after the battle*

## GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN 05

**US Marines land on the islands of Guadalcanal, Tulagi and Nggela in the Solomon Islands on 7 August, beginning a long and difficult campaign for control of the western Pacific. The Japanese eventually withdraw their forces in February 1943.**

© Alamy

*Unloading supplies and equipment on Guadalcanal, c.1943*

**19 February 1942**

## BOMBING OF DARWIN 02

**At 09.58 the Australian town of Darwin, in the Northern Territory, is attacked by 188 Japanese bombers and fighters. The airfield and harbour are targeted and 252 personnel and civilians are killed in the attacks. It is the first of nearly 100 raids on northern Australia during the war.**

**18 April 1942**

## DOOLITTLE RAID

**Sixteen modified B-25 bombers from 17th Bombardment Group, USAAF, carry out a successful bombing raid on Tokyo. Launching from the carrier USS Hornet, the bombers evade Japanese detection and anti-aircraft defences, dropping an estimated 14 tons of bombs on factories, ammunition dumps and other military targets. The successful raid on the Japanese capital is a huge morale boost for the US.**

© Getty

*Lieutenant Colonel James H Doolittle, commander of the raid, and his bomber crew just before takeoff for the mission*

**3-8 May 1942**

**4-5 June 1942**

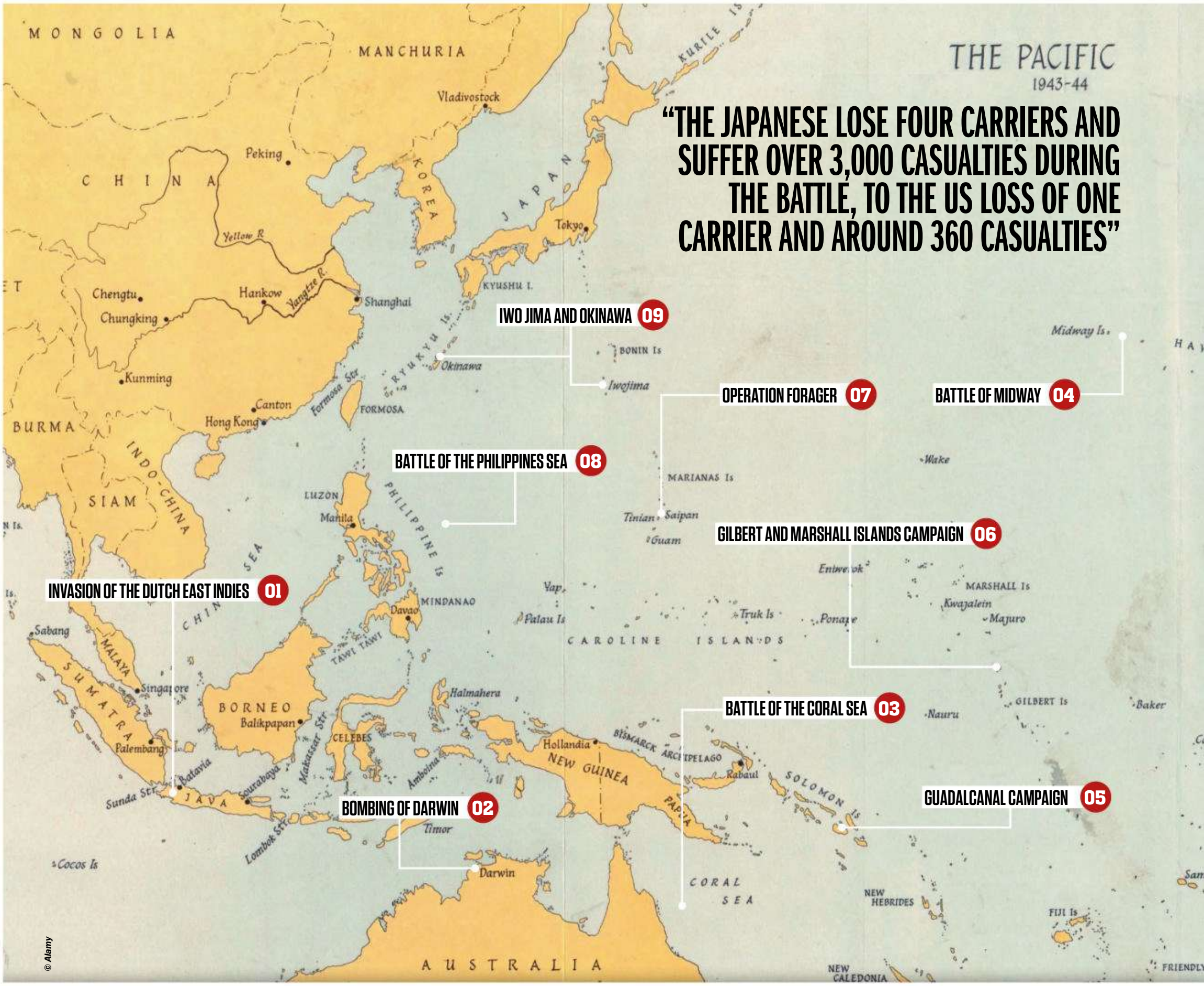
## BATTLE OF MIDWAY 04

**Japan launches an offensive against Midway Atoll, a key US position in the Pacific that would give the IJN a base from which to strike further east towards Hawaii. Four IJN carriers launch aircraft to attack Midway's airfield, but upon returning to refuel are themselves attacked by the US fleet. The Japanese lose four carriers and suffer over 3,000 casualties to the US loss of one carrier and around 360 casualties.**

© Getty

*USS Yorktown comes under attack during the Battle of Midway*

**7 August 1942 – 9 February 1943**

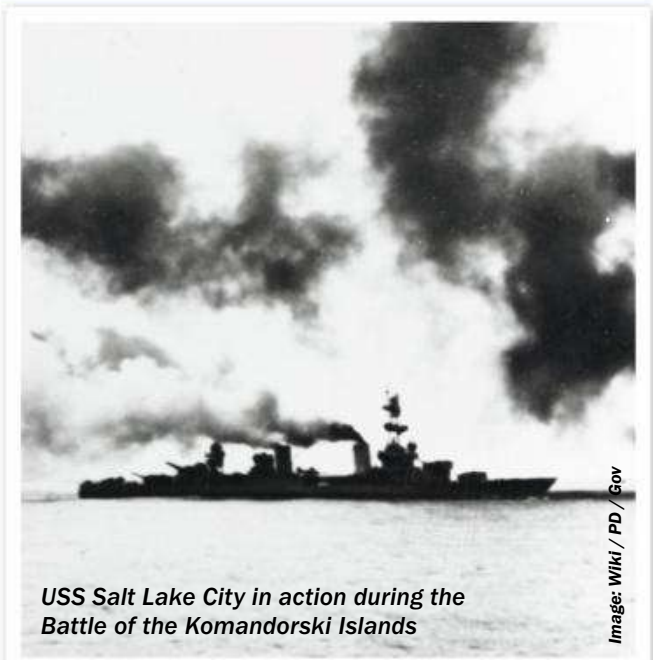



27 March 1943

November 1943 – February 1944

## BATTLE OF THE KOMANDORSKI ISLANDS

A US task force under Rear Admiral Charles Horatio McMorris engages a Japanese convoy commanded by Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya, in the north-west Pacific region. The convoy was en route to resupplying Japanese forces in the Aleutian Islands, Alaska. Though inconclusive, the engagement prevents the Japanese resupply mission.



*USS Salt Lake City in action during the Battle of the Komandorski Islands*

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

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## GILBERT AND MARSHALL ISLANDS CAMPAIGN 06

Admiral Chester W Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the US Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas, launches an amphibious invasion of the large number small coral islands and atolls known as the Gilberts and the Marshalls. This relieves pressure from the south-west Pacific region, establishing air bases from which to continue attacks into the central Pacific.

*F6F-3 Hellcats aboard the USS Yorktown en route to the Marshall Islands, 1943*

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

## JAPAN SURRENDERS

**After nuclear bombs are detonated over Hiroshima (6 August) and Nagasaki (9 August), the Japanese Emperor Hirohito is forced to concede defeat and agrees to surrender days later. The document of surrender is signed aboard the USS Missouri, in Tokyo Bay.**

*Japanese representatives, including Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu (with the cane) and General Yoshijiro Umezu, Chief of the Army General Staff, aboard USS Missouri*

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

## IWO JIMA AND OKINAWA 09

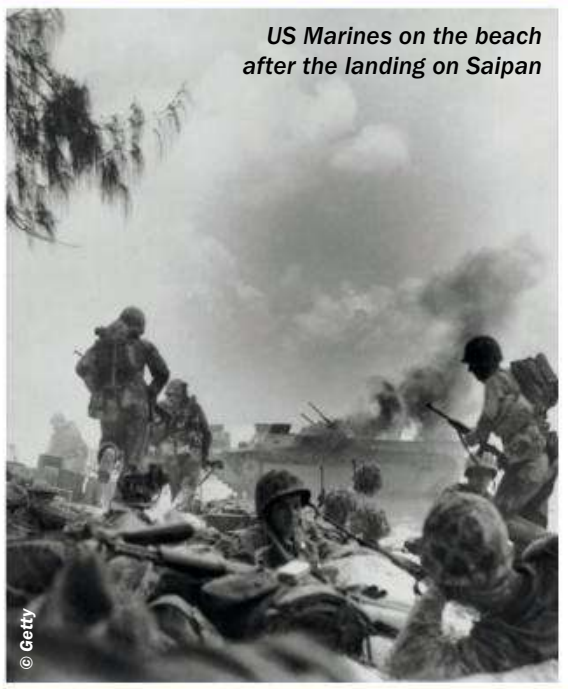
**After securing the central Pacific region, the US targets the Ryukyu and Bonin Islands, which are in close proximity to mainland Japan. The Battles of Iwo Jima (19 February – 26 March) and Okinawa (1 April – 22 June) are incredibly costly for the US Marines, and the value of their occupation is later called into question.**

*Two Marines from the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment during fighting at Wana Ridge in the Battle of Okinawa, May 1945*

June – November 1944 — 19-20 June 1944 — 19 February – 22 June 1945 — 2 September 1945

## OPERATION FORAGER 07

The fight for the Mariana islands begins with the Battle of Saipan, which sees US Marines encounter fierce enemy resistance. A preliminary bombardment fails to sufficiently damage Japanese artillery emplacements, leading to over 3,500 US casualties on the first day. Saipan is eventually secured by July, followed by the islands of Guam and Tinian. Capture of these islands enables the Americans to launch air strikes against the Japanese mainland.



© Getty

*US Marines on the beach after the landing on Saipan*

## BATTLE OF THE PHILIPPINES SEA 08

In an attempt to stop the US Navy from further supporting operations in the central Pacific, the IJN launches an attack against Task Force 58, off the coast of Saipan. The battle largely involves carrier-based aircraft. With greatly depleted numbers of experienced pilots, the Japanese squadrons are easily bested by the US Navy pilots, who call the battle "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot".

*Contrails left during the intense aerial combat in the battle*

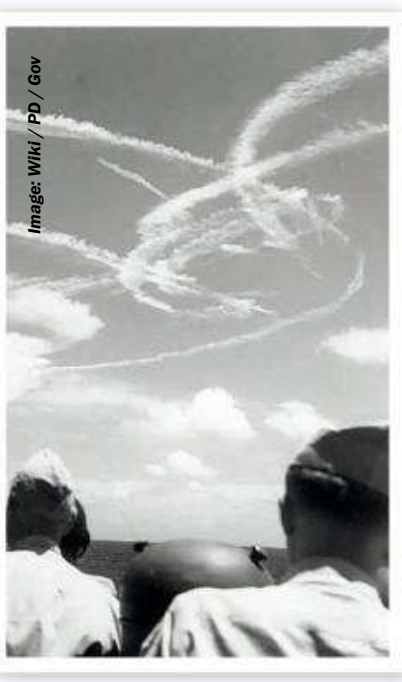


Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

# JAPAN'S ROAD TO WAR

## Less than a century after emerging from cultural and economic isolation, Imperial Japan's expansion led to a confrontation with the nation that had first disturbed its solitude

During the mid-1850s the United States opened feudal Japan to trade with the Western world. From its earliest awakening to the international community Japan rapidly industrialised and began to exert influence beyond its own borders. In less than a century, Japanese leaders began to perceive their culture and people as preeminent on the continent of Asia as well as across the vast Pacific rim.

By the early 20th century, Japan had emerged as an Asian power with global reach, shocking the world with its defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. Japan later joined the Allies in World War I, receiving post-conflict League of Nations authorisation to administer former German colonies in the Pacific, as well as having ruled Korea by mandate since 1910.

The road to war in the Pacific was virtually inevitable from a Japanese perspective. By the late-1920s, a rise of militarism in the country had coincided with the recognition of an opportunity to extend its influence, subjugate other Asian peoples, and exploit the resources that were required to perpetuate and protect Japanese interests beyond the confines of its borders. Japan embarked on a programme of military expansion, building a navy comparable in several respects to those of the United States and Great Britain, while reluctantly (and temporarily) acquiescing to treaty limitations on the strength, number and type of warships constructed. During this period Japan also augmented its land armies and air power.

While the military establishment acknowledged its subservience to Emperor Hirohito, the almost god-like figure who ruled from the Chrysanthemum Throne, foreign policy was principally directed by the prime minister and government ministers, who favoured expansion of Japan's power.

The Japanese decision to wage war against the United States stemmed from its need to supply and equip its growing armed forces that provided the muscle behind the racist rhetoric and policies of the country's leaders. Japanese influence in the region was presented to the world as benevolent and beneficial to its neighbours. Under the guise of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" the Japanese promised to throw off the yoke of European and North American exploitation. Their watchwords were "Asia for Asians", however this in fact disguised their actual intentions to subjugate "Asia for the Japanese".

By 1931, the Imperial Japanese Army had already mounted an offensive incursion into the Chinese province of Manchuria, and in 1937 a staged incident at the Marco Polo Bridge near the Chinese capital led to a full-scale war. The objective of the Japanese was clear: Manchuria's abundant natural resources. Japanese designs on the Dutch East Indies and other areas were similarly motivated, and the entire sphere of growing influence would be protected from retaliation from across the Pacific by a strong navy and a cordon of fortified island outposts stretching across the expansive ocean.

"Japan is an island nation that needed access to resources outside its territory, particularly oil from the East Indies that would fuel their military machine," explained historian John Wukovits. "[This would] facilitate the industrial growth needed to maintain that military and to economically dominate the Pacific region. The Japanese realised that in order to sustain their military, and execute a grand strategy of territorial expansion and hegemony in the Pacific, they had to be able to sustain their war machine."

Throughout the 1930s, Japanese expansion was warily watched by European countries with colonies in the Pacific. Additionally the United States, which had for some time exerted a paternalistic attitude toward China, observed Japanese aggression with increasing alarm, particularly after Japan joined the totalitarian European powers of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in an alliance dubbed the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. After the fall of France in 1940, Japanese troops occupied northern Indochina and then the whole of the colony.

US President Franklin D Roosevelt had already begun to respond to this overt expansionism. He ordered the US Pacific Fleet to relocate from its anchorage at San Diego, California, to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, more than 3,200km closer to Japan. Economic measures – including embargoes of raw materials such as scrap iron, aviation fuel, aluminium, steel, copper, bronze and machinery – were stepped up. The most crippling embargo was that on oil, the life blood of the Japanese military: 80 percent of the country's oil was imported from the United States. Soon enough, a US demand that Japan withdraw its troops from China and Indochina followed.

The Japanese government found itself at a crossroads. Abandoning the aggressive strategy it had pursued for more than a decade would mean a loss of international prestige, and the militaristic government of Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, an army general who came to power in October 1941, opted for war with the United States.

© Alamy

***Left:** A Japanese illustration of a reception for Commodore Matthew Perry, the American naval officer who instigated Japan's ports opening to global commerce*

*Emperor Hirohito, photographed in the 1930s, in military uniform*

© Getty

**“THE JAPANESE REALISED THAT IN ORDER TO SUSTAIN THEIR MILITARY, AS WELL AS EXECUTE A GRAND STRATEGY OF TERRITORIAL EXPANSION AND HEGEMONY IN THE PACIFIC, THEY HAD TO SUSTAIN THEIR WAR MACHINE”**

# FROM PEARL HARBOR TO GUADALCANAL

After the disaster in Hawaii, the US employed an island-hopping strategy in the Pacific, carefully choosing where to strike in order to suffocate Japan's sprawling occupation of the theatre

*US Marines photographed landing at Guadalcanal, 1942*

© Getty

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander-in-chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy's (IJN) Combined Fleet, warned that a prolonged war against the United States would inevitably be lost. In the event, Japanese naval aircraft dealt a heavy blow against Pearl Harbor and other US military installations in Hawaii. Within hours, Japanese forces also struck at British Malaya, Wake Island, the Philippines and Midway atoll. Japanese forces subsequently advanced from victory to victory, as Wake and Hong Kong fell in December 1941. By the following spring Japanese troops had also conquered the British bastion of Singapore, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines.

However, the hard-pressed forces of the United States were resilient, focusing their efforts on stemming the Japanese tide. Although its offensive capability was initially quite limited, the US Navy managed to halt the Japanese attempt to occupy Port Moresby in the southeast of New Guinea and diminish the threat of an invasion of Australia with a strategic victory in the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942. A month later, the Battle of Midway proved to be the turning point of World War II in the Pacific. Utilising valuable intelligence gleaned at Station Hypo in Hawaii as American cryptanalysts cracked JN25B, the IJN's operations code, US Navy planners surprised the Japanese during their Midway offensive and inflicted a stinging defeat.

In August 1942, American Marines landed on the island of Guadalcanal in the Solomon archipelago. During six months of bitter fighting, a series of naval battles swirled around Guadalcanal, and the Americans maintained control of the island's vital airfield, forcing the Japanese to evacuate the island in February 1943. The battle for Guadalcanal was the first in which the Japanese and American Marine and Army troops fought one another. It was a brutal affair, but the US won the hard-fought victory in another pivotal engagement.

With the victories at Midway and Guadalcanal, the Americans seized the initiative in the Pacific War and began the long, bloody campaign on the island road to Tokyo. US strategic planners had identified two specific operational areas in the Pacific. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander-in-Chief South West Pacific, was to lead an offensive through the Solomons, New Guinea, the Bismarck Islands and the Philippines, while Admiral Chester W Nimitz, Supreme Commander Pacific Ocean Areas, would conduct a series of amphibious operations against Japanese-held islands in the Gilbert, Marshall and Marianas archipelagos. This two-pronged offensive would stretch the Japanese capacity to wage defensive war to its limits.

**"THE HARD-PRESSED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES WERE RESILIENT, FOCUSING THEIR EFFORTS ON STEMMING THE JAPANESE TIDE"**

The Americans intended to vigorously prosecute their offensive across the Pacific, bypassing some enemy-occupied islands identified during tactical assessment and severing their critical supply lines. US military planners were confident that this island-hopping strategy would cause these bypassed and isolated Japanese strongholds to wither on the vine. In practice, the strategy proved quite effective.

"During the summer and autumn of 1943, American forces in the Pacific were strengthened with the introduction of the Essex-class aircraft carrier, the Iowa-class battleship and the Grumman F6F Hellcat fighter," historian John Wukovits explains. "These state-of-the-art weapons platforms were instrumental in waging the offensive war against Japan. In addition, the US Marine Corps and US Army committed growing numbers of fighting men to the effort. While MacArthur attacked in the Solomons and New Guinea, Nimitz launched the series of amphibious landings in the Central Pacific. The first of these occurred at Tarawa and Makin in the Gilberts in November 1943."

In 1944, the Americans wrested control of key island fortresses from the Japanese, including Kwajalein and Eniwetok in the Marshalls; and Guam, Saipan and Tinian in the Marianas. In June of that year, Japanese naval air power was virtually annihilated at the Battle of the Philippine Sea, and in October the IJN was again defeated in the decisive Battle of Leyte Gulf. This Japanese defeat coincided with MacArthur's forces landing in the Philippines on the island of Leyte, marking the general's much-publicised return.

*Unloading of supplies ferried from US Navy ships at Guadalcanal*

© Getty

# TURNING THE TIDE

## Q&A WITH HISTORIAN JOHN WUKOVITS

Though Imperial Japan began on the front foot in 1941, several critical battles sealed victory for the Allies in 1945

**John Wukovits is a military historian and the author of several acclaimed books on World War II in the Pacific, including *One Square Mile of Hell: The Battle for Tarawa.***

*The US Navy continued to grow in strength during the Pacific conflict, while the Japanese struggled with limited resources*

## What do you consider the turning points in the Pacific War?

The American victory at the Battle of Midway was certainly a turning point. American dive bombers sank four Japanese aircraft carriers and forced the Japanese to abandon their effort to occupy Midway. Had they been successful, the Japanese threat to Hawaii would have been much more viable.

The complex plan that Admiral Yamamoto had devised was compromised from the start and the Japanese sustained losses that were irreplaceable in wartime, not only in aircraft carriers but also in trained pilots and aircrews. After Midway, the US Navy continued to grow in strength while the Japanese struggled with limited resources. The defence of their perimeter in the Central Pacific, rather than the extension of it, became a priority for the Japanese.

The significance of the US Navy's intelligence operation, which broke the Japanese operations code, can't be overstated. The intelligence gained actually allowed Admiral Nimitz to order the American navy to a point that would give it the advantage of surprise. The cryptanalysts at Station Hypo under Commander Rochefort were the unsung heroes of Midway, and their story didn't really come to light until years after the war was over.

Another important turning point in the Pacific War was the American occupation of Guadalcanal. Had the Japanese held the island and completed the airstrip that the Americans later named Henderson Field, they would have threatened American bases in the South Pacific as they came within range of Japanese planes. At Guadalcanal, the US Marines hung tough and fought some of the most desperate battles of the Pacific War. At sea, the battles around Guadalcanal were costly for the American navy, especially the night engagements. The Japanese were proficient in night combat and the Americans weren't. Still, the Americans managed to win.

Both Midway and Guadalcanal allowed the United States to turn the tide in the Pacific War. Once the Americans had taken the offensive the outcome of the war was a foregone conclusion. It became a matter of time and cost in lives and treasure.

## How consequential were the battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa?

The fighting at Iwo Jima was painful and costly, and nearly 7,000 US Marines were killed in that battle alone. Iwo Jima was important because of its proximity to the Japanese home islands. Its airfields could be landing points for American B-29 bombers damaged during raids over Japan if they couldn't make it back to bases in the Marianas. In fact, a B-29 made an emergency landing on Iwo Jima before the island was declared secure.

**"THE DEFENCE OF THEIR PERIMETER IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC, RATHER THAN THE EXTENSION OF IT, BECAME A PRIORITY FOR THE JAPANESE"**

The raising of the American flag on Mount Suribachi at Iwo Jima was one of the iconic moments of World War II, and Joe Rosenthal's photograph may well be the most famous image of the whole war. Iwo Jima was an example of Japanese defence in-depth. In other words, they waited until the US Marines were crowded on the landing beaches before opening fire. And really rather than contesting the landings immediately, the Japanese burrowed into caves and bunkers and networks of tunnels all over the island, and the fight to root them out was brutal.

Of course, all strategic effort was aimed toward an eventual Allied invasion of the Japanese home islands. However, there was still another amphibious operation necessary before the invasion of Japan. In what turned out to be the final battle of the Pacific War, American Marines and Army troops landed on the island of Okinawa, a mere 550km from the home island of Kyushu. Again the Japanese were stubborn in their defence. They fortified three defensive lines in the southwest part of the island, and each of these lines had to be taken. The most formidable was the Shuri Line, and the Marines faced strongpoints with interlocking fields of fire and rocky terrains with high ground and deep ravines. Names like Half Moon, Conical Hill, Sugar Loaf, the Horseshoe and others were given to some of these terrain features.

*American troops observe phosphorus shells detonating during the Battle of Okinawa*

*Images © Getty*

# Frontline

*A US soldier on the beachhead during the Battle of Okinawa, the last major engagement between America and Japan*

© Getty

# DOWNFALL
# THE INVASION OF JAPAN

Without a swift end to the war in sight, the Allies planned a gruelling campaign on the Japanese home islands – a potentially costly operation avoided only by the use of nuclear weapons and Japan's surrender

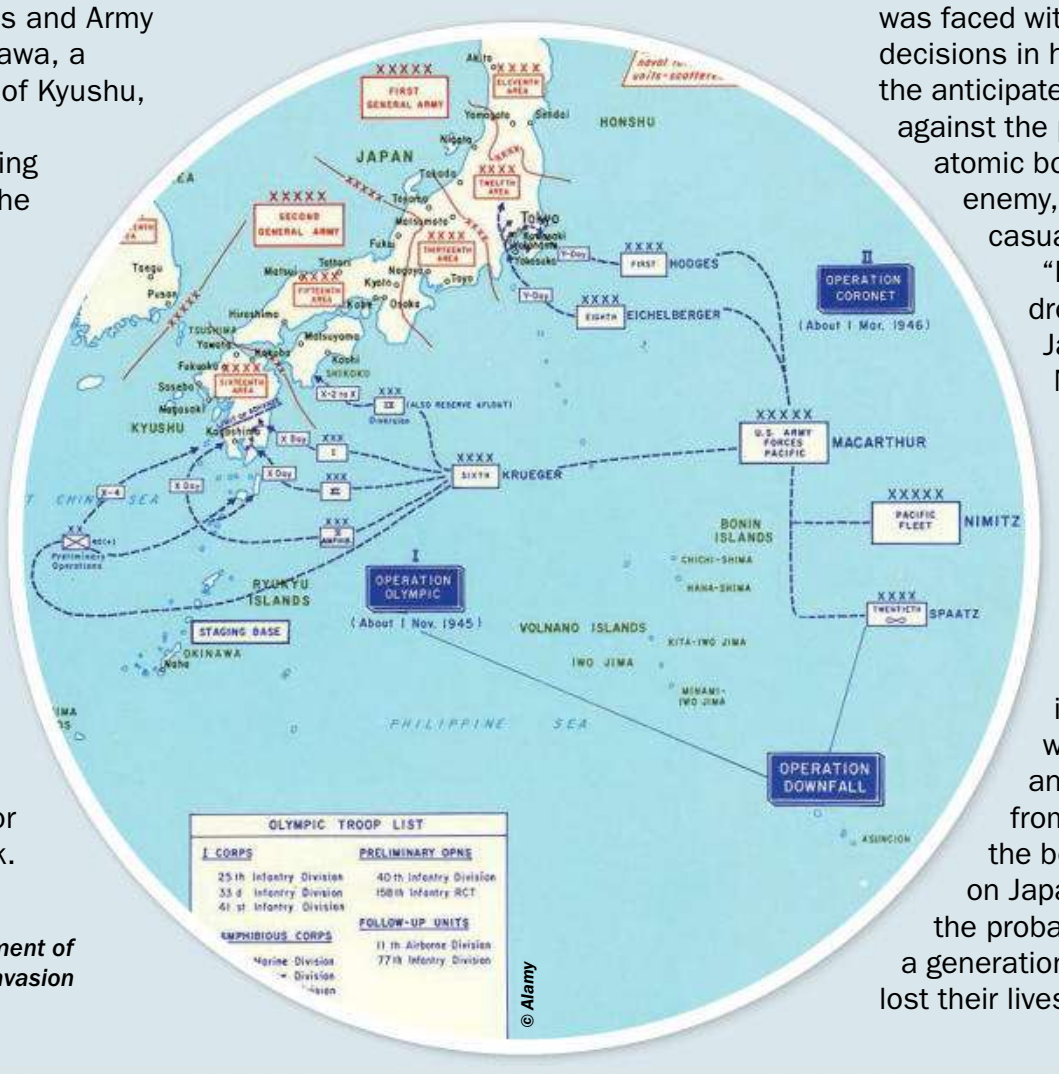
By 1945 it was apparent that Japan would inevitably lose the Pacific War in a grinding, attritional struggle. Nevertheless, its military fought with dogged determination, with most of its soldiers defending to the death rather than surrender. In desperation, the Japanese introduced the kamikaze suicide air attacks that took a severe toll on US Navy warships. Still, large formations of American heavy bombers, taking off from airfields in the Marianas, devastated Japanese cities with intense raids.

In February, US Marines swept ashore on the island of Iwo Jima in the Volcano Islands, only 1,200km from Tokyo. After more than a month of fighting, Iwo Jima was secure. All strategic effort was aimed toward an eventual Allied invasion of the Japanese home islands. However, there was still another amphibious operation necessary before the invasion of Japan. In what turned out to be the final battle of the Pacific War, American Marines and Army troops landed on the island of Okinawa, a mere 550km from the home island of Kyushu, on 1 April 1945.

After more than 80 days of gruelling combat, Okinawa was secured. At the same time, the US Navy ships off the coast of the island endured a firestorm of kamikaze attacks but remained on station, absorbing tremendous punishment and earning the nickname 'The Fleet That Came to Stay'. The cost of conquest on Okinawa was tremendous. Of the 100,000 Japanese defenders, only 11,000 were left alive to be taken prisoner when the island was declared secure on 22 June 1945. American combat deaths on Okinawa totalled nearly 7,400, with 31,800 wounded. More than 4,900 naval personnel were killed or missing and 29 US Navy ships sunk.

The spectre of a protracted bloodbath loomed with the anticipated invasion of the Japanese home islands, codenamed Operation Downfall. The Downfall plan was divided into two tactical offensive landings: Operation Olympic, assaults on the beaches on the home island of Kyushu, scheduled for 1 November 1945; and Operation Coronet, landings at the Kanto Plain on the island of Honshu, scheduled for 1 March 1946. Fanatical opposition was expected, not only from all available Japanese military units on land, sea and air but also from a mobilised civilian population.

Further, the projected initial commitment of US troops on land during both Downfall components was expected to approach two million men, while anticipated casualties during the long campaign would easily top a million. The combined arms effort would have been the largest military operation of its kind in history, including dozens of aircraft carriers and battleships along with thousands of fighters, bombers and airlift planes. As World War II in Europe ended, Great Britain and the Commonwealth nations were able to devote further resources to the Pacific War, and a substantial contribution to Downfall would come from them as well.




For many months, the United States had been committed to the development of an atomic bomb, its devastating capabilities existing at first only in the realm of the theoretical. The Manhattan Project, as it was called, had made remarkable progress at a top-secret research facility in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the successful test of the world's first operational nuclear weapon occurred at the Trinity site in the Jornada del Muerto desert on 16 July 1945. US President Harry Truman had learned of the existence of the Manhattan Project only after the death of President Roosevelt the previous April. As the day of decision loomed in the Pacific, Truman was faced with one of the most consequential decisions in human history. He considered the anticipated cost of the invasion of Japan against the potential devastation of the atomic bomb unleashed against the enemy, including the horrific toll in civilian casualties that would occur.

"President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 ranks among the most controversial in history," says historian John Wukovits. "There was no question that an actual invasion of Japan would be a bloody and arduous affair. As it was, the cost in lives that followed the use of the atomic bombs was incredible. Around 200,000 people were killed or injured in the blasts, and there were lingering effects from radiation exposure. The use of the bombs brought terrible retribution on Japan. However, Truman had to weigh the probable cost in Allied lives as well, and a generation of young men that might have lost their lives in battle was spared."

***Right:** A map showing the proposed deployment of forces as part of Operation Downfall – the invasion of the Japanese home islands*

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# HITLER'S TIGER ACE

**Michael Wittmann, aka the Black Baron, was a hugely successful panzer commander and propaganda icon for the Nazis. His role in the Waffen-SS left a dark legacy**

WORDS **JON TRIGG**

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Born in Bavaria on 22 April 1914, Michael Wittmann would go on to become the most famous Waffen-SS Tiger Ace (a panzer commander credited with multiple kills, also called a 'Panzer Ace') of World War II. First in Russia and then most famously at the Battle of Villers-Bocage on 13 June 1944, in Normandy, he would win fame and glory before his death in combat on 8 August that same year. Feted by the Nazi propaganda machine, his legacy is a controversial one, with historians casting doubt on his achievements and abilities as a panzer commander.

Wittmann was born a farmer's son but didn't follow in his father's footsteps: he opted for a military life and in 1934, aged 20, enlisted in the army. Having served for two years Wittmann – also a member of the Nazi Party – made the decision to transfer to the still infant Waffen-SS. He was assigned to Hitler's own bodyguard, the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH), a motorised infantry regiment, and following the outbreak of war he fought with the Leibstandarte in the invasions of Poland, France and the Balkans. By then he had been promoted to NCO rank, but his career only really took off with the advent of Operation Barbarossa – the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, on 22 June 1941.

A small number of self-propelled assault guns had been incorporated into the LSSAH as far back as April 1940, although they were not formally recognised as a sub-unit until after the defeat of France. By the time of the invasion the LSSAH was the strength of a division but wasn't officially designated as such until the end of 1941. Regardless, it contained a full battalion of self-propelled StuG III assault guns, one of which was commanded by Wittmann. As part of Gerd von Rundstedt's Heeresgruppe Süd (Army Group South) Wittmann took part in Barbarossa's huge advances that summer and was awarded the Iron Cross First Class.

Having captured the major city of Rostov-on-Don, the LSSAH was forced to retreat by the Red Army's winter counter-offensive and was severely mauled in the process. Erwin Bartmann, a member of the LSSAH at the time, recalled: "On 2 December we had to evacuate Rostov… the enemy being too strong for us… it was a wild retreat, we had to get out as soon as possible." With the arrival of spring, Bartmann described how "the Russian propaganda loudspeakers wished us a pleasant stay in France – that's how we first learned we were to be withdrawn from the Russian front… for refitting and reorganisation". Leaving Russia for France in June 1942, Wittmann was selected for officer training and sent to the SS academy at Bad Tölz in Bavaria.

**"THE SMELL OF BURNING FLESH WAS TERRIBLE AND IT WAS DISTRESSING TO HEAR THE SOUND OF MEN BURNING TO DEATH IN THEIR TANKS"**

## Kursk and the Tiger

After successfully passing his officer course, Wittmann returned to the LSSAH and was subsequently given command of a new Tiger I tank. This was one of the stand-out tank designs of the war, having enormously thick frontal hull and turret armour measuring 100mm, and the superlative 8.8cm KwK 36 gun. It was in the Tiger that Wittmann would become one of Germany's 'Panzer Aces' as he and his exceptional crew – especially his gunner, Balthasar 'Bobby' Woll – exploited the Tiger's superb protection from enemy fire, and its tank-killing main gun, to maximum effect. After the disaster of the Battle of Stalingrad (August 1942 – February 1943) Hitler decided on a new offensive to recapture the initiative in the east and crush the Red Army.

Operation Citadel was designed as a huge pincer attack involving the majority of Nazi Germany's armoured strength on the Russian Front, and Wittmann's LSSAH would play a prominent role as part of Erich von Manstein's Army Group South. Significant faith was placed by the Germans in the ability of the new Tiger and Panzerkampfwagen V Panther tanks to smash the Soviet defences and break

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*SS-Obersturmführer Michael Wittmann (far left) and his crew stand in front of their Tiger I in Russia, 15 February, 1944. Note the multiple 'kill rings' on the Tiger's gun. Bobby Woll – Wittmann's gunner and fellow Knight's Cross winner - is second from left*

Image: Jon Trigg

*Wittmann (centre) shortly after his demolition of the British offensive at Villers-Bocage in June 1944. On the left is Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich, and on the right is Dietrich's adjutant, SS-Hauptsturmführer Hermann 'Bibl' Weiser*

*Wittmann receives the Eichenlauben (Oakleaves) to his Knight's Cross from Adolf Hitler at the Wolf's Lair, Hitler's headquarters in Rastenburg, on 2 February 1944. He would receive the Schwerter (Swords) on 22 June*

*Image: Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1987-074-33*

through to the objective – the city of Kursk. However, the new vehicles had been rushed into service without the proper tests and trials, and suffered from significant problems.

In particular the Panther was prone to technical issues and breakdowns. The advancing Germans found themselves having to fight through line after line of Soviet defences constructed in depth, which resulted in major casualties and robbed the offensive of its momentum. Werner Block from Hamburg – the driver of a Tiger at the time – recounted how "the smell of burning flesh was terrible and it was distressing to hear the sound of men burning to death in their tanks". After only eight days Hitler called off the Kursk offensive.

The Germans had suffered a major defeat in what would turn out to be their last great summer offensive in the east. Wittmann had fought in the battle with the 13th Heavy Tank Company of the Leibstandarte's 1st SS Panzer Regiment, and despite the eventual rout at the hands of the Russians his performance enhanced his reputation. With an experienced crew and a main gun able to destroy a T-34/76 (the main battle tank of the Red Army at the time) at a distance of 1,500m, Wittmann had claimed 30 enemy tank kills during the battle and was duly awarded the much-coveted Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.

## Endgame in the east

With the cancellation of Operation Citadel, the LSSAH was despatched to Italy after the Allied landings in Sicily. Re-equipped once more and redesignated a full panzer division, the LSSAH then headed east again and was involved in the heavy defensive battles at the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944. During this time Wittmann was awarded the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross from Hitler himself for achieving 117 tank kills overall. Shortly after, Wittmann and the LSSAH were en route west for yet another reorganisation as Nazi Germany prepared for the anticipated Allied invasion of France.

In April 1944, having been promoted to SS-Obersturmführer (senior lieutenant) and given command of a company of 12 Tigers, Wittmann was based in Beauvais, northwest of Paris, as part of Heavy SS-Panzer Battalion 101. When the Allies landed in Normandy on D-Day the battalion had 37 of its 45 Tigers operational and was ordered to the front, struggling through frequent air attacks and breakdowns to reach the battle days after the landings. On arrival it was immediately ordered into action to try and stem a dangerous British breakthrough to the strategically vital village of Villers-Bocage. As Kurt 'Panzer' Meyer – a famed regimental commander in the 12. SS-Panzerdivision Hitlerjugend – declared: "If a breakthrough of the German front succeeded the defence of Caen would be lifted off its hinges."

## Villers-Bocage

On the morning of Tuesday 13 June, with only six of his company's Tigers operational, Wittmann advanced to find the British 7th Armoured Division – the Desert Rats – already in possession of the town. Leading the British advance was a mixed battle group of County of London Yeomanry tanks and mechanised infantry from the Rifle Brigade. Wittmann decided to attack alone and fought perhaps the most famous panzer engagement of the war.

Having taken the village without resistance earlier that morning the British were regrouping when Wittmann – himself having been taken by surprise by the British arrival – launched an attack. Ordering the rest of his company to stand their ground he took his own Tiger forward. Accounts of the action are disputed but what is clear is that Wittmann caught the British unawares and proceeded to wreak havoc among the stationary tanks, guns and vehicles.

The British scrabbled to react as Wittmann's Tiger fired shell after shell into their ranks and swept the battlefield with machine-gun fire. British Churchill tanks, trucks and Bren-gun carriers went up in flames as fleeing

***Below:** Wittmann wrote to the father of Rudolf Janssen that his son had been killed by a direct bomb hit on 8 June, 1944, in the wood of Versailles, dying "a heroic death fighting for the freedom of our nation" and that "we will continue to fight for him". It is dated: "In the west, 22 June 1944." **Below inset:** A photograph of Wittmann from the* Weltbild *newspaper of 17 June, 1944*

*Wittmann pictured in northern France, prior to Operation Overlord*

*Image: Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-299-1802-08 / Scheck / CC-BY-SA 3.0*

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*German paratroopers advance supported by Tigers of the 1st SS Panzer Division LSSAH on the Eastern Front, 1944*




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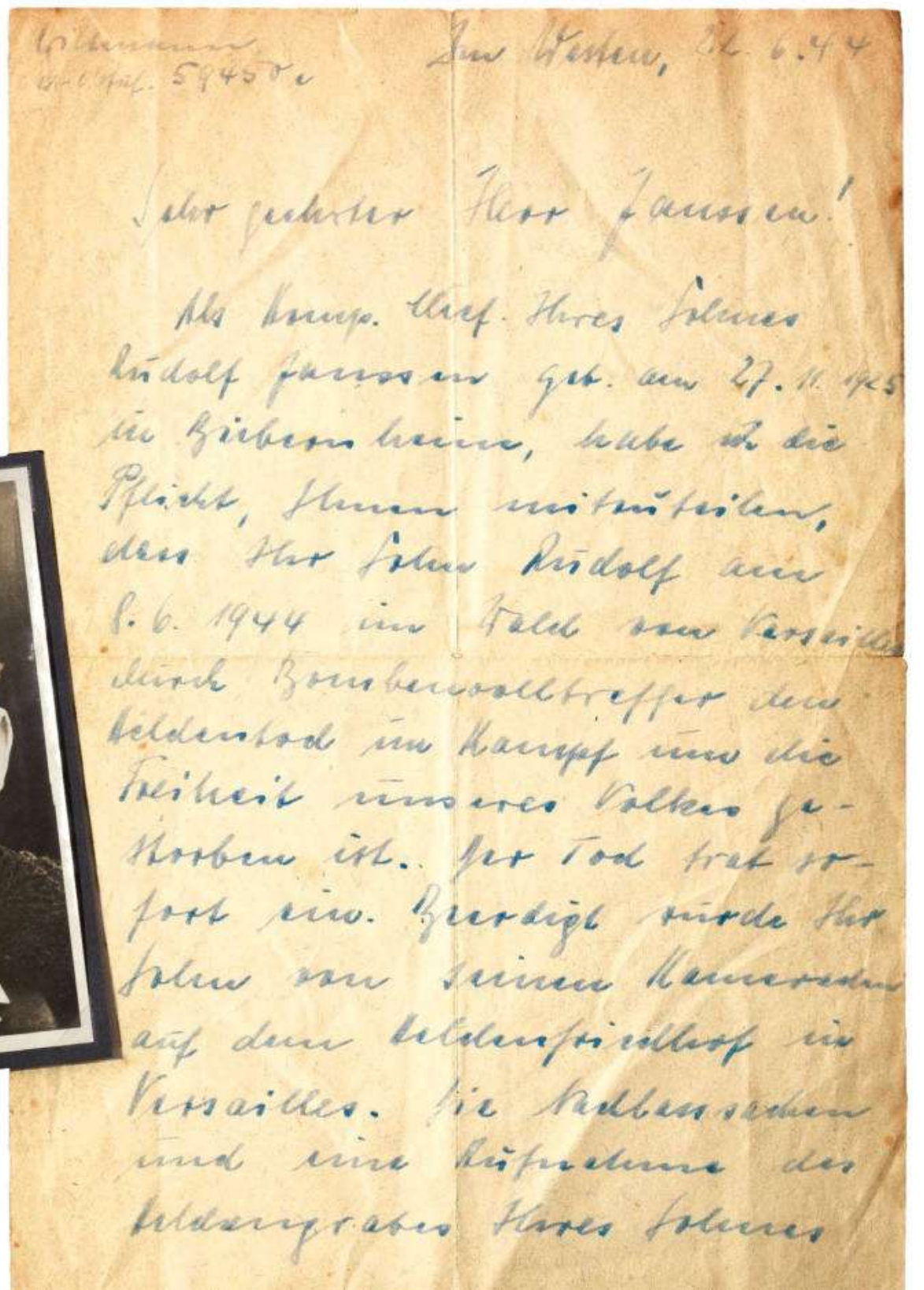


# 101ST HEAVY SS PANZER BATTALION

During the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 the Wehrmacht's tank force – the Panzerwaffe – hitherto almost invincible, was shocked by Soviet tanks like the T-34 and KV-series that were superior to their own. Germany responded by developing bigger panzers with hugely powerful guns able to destroy enemy tanks at huge distances, while having armour so thick they were almost invulnerable. This was the genesis of the Tiger.

Expensive and time-consuming to manufacture, only 1,347 Tiger I's were produced as opposed to over 80,000 T-34's, so the decision was made to maximise their effectiveness by grouping them in special battalions that would only be used at the most critical sectors of the front. These were christened schwere Panzer-Abteilungen – Heavy Panzer Battalions – of which 15 would be formed by war's end: 12 for the Heer (Army) and three for the Waffen-SS. The first to be created were the Heer's schwere Panzer-Abteilung 501 and 502 in 1942, which fought in North Africa and at Leningrad respectively.

The experiment was not a success. Blighted by mechanical problems and unsuitable terrain, several Tigers were lost, but the Nazis ploughed on and in the summer of 1943 formed the first of its armed SS equivalents: the schwere SS-Panzer-Abteilung 101 (101st Heavy SS Panzer Battalion). Initially intended to be grouped with smaller, faster Panzer III's for flank protection and to then spearhead major offensives, the heavy panzer battalions faced their first major test in Unternehmen Zitadelle (Operation Citadel) in July 1943. Commonly known as the Battle of Kursk, Zitadelle was intended to swing the war in the east back in Germany's favour after the Stalingrad disaster. The heavy battalions' role was to smash through the Soviet defences and hand Hitler victory.

Richard von Rosen, a Tiger commander, recalled: "Panzer Marsch!… I thought we were through the defences when more than 20 anti-tank guns flashed… never before had we come across such a concentration of firepower." The Red Army was too strong and the heavy panzer battalions failed. From then on the deteriorating situation forced the Germans to use the heavy battalions in a defensive role to try and make up for their lack of numbers. The arrival of even heavier Tiger II's didn't make any difference as the heavies were rushed from crisis to crisis. By war's end they'd destroyed some 9,850 enemy tanks for the loss of 1,715 of their own, a kill/loss ratio of 5.74. It wasn't enough. The experiment had failed.

*A Tiger tank pictured in the Bjelgorod-Orel region, on the Eastern Front*

*Images © Getty*

**"I THOUGHT WE WERE THROUGH THE DEFENCES WHEN MORE THAN 20 ANTI-TANK GUNS FLASHED… NEVER BEFORE HAD WE COME ACROSS SUCH A CONCENTRATION OF FIREPOWER"**

*Infantry are supported by a Tiger while pressing into a village on the Eastern Front*

**"H AN ACTION THAT LASTED JUST A FEW MINUTES WITTMANN HAD MANAGED TO SMASH THE BRITISH SPEARHEAD AND HALT THE ENTIRE OFFENSIVE"**

*Hitler inspecting members of Leibstandarte-SS 'Adolf Hitler', in its first incarnation in 1939*

© Alamy

infantrymen were mown down. Eventually Wittmann's Tiger was disabled and he and his crew were forced to abandon it and escape on foot. However, in an action that lasted just a few minutes, Wittmann had managed to smash the British spearhead and halt the entire offensive in its tracks.

Exact losses are impossible to pin down but in all likelihood Wittmann and his crew destroyed a dozen or more tanks, at least that many half-tracks and other vehicles and at least a couple of anti-tank guns. It was a remarkable feat and one that earned Wittmann the Swords to his Knight's Cross. Seizing on the success the Nazis made significant propaganda use of Wittmann, interviewing and filming him for newsreels to be replayed back in the Reich. A catchy title was even dreamt up for him and he was christened the Black Baron – in reference both to the famous Red Baron fighter pilot of the First World War and to the black SS panzer uniform he wore.

## The Baron's final battle

In the weeks following Villers-Bocage the Allies pounded the Germans from air, land and sea. Manfred Thorn – an experienced Panzer IV driver in the LSSAH – said of the Normandy battles: "The tactic of unbroken artillery barrages lasting for hours was gruesome mental and physical torture." The attritional nature of the fighting took its toll on the Germans, who were gradually losing the initiative to the Allied forces.

Just over three weeks after his triumph at Villers-Bocage, Wittmann was once more ordered forward to try and blunt yet another Allied offensive, this time near Saint-Aignan-de-Cramesnil. It was 8 August 1944. Kurt Meyer – by now the divisional commander of the Hitlerjugend – recalled how he "shook Michael Wittmann's hand once again and indicated to him the critical situation. Good Michael laughed his youthful laugh and climbed into his Tiger".

Leading a mixed bag of Tigers, Panzer IVs and assault guns, Wittmann advanced and fell straight into a joint Anglo-Canadian armour ambush. Taken by surprise, his force was badly mauled and Wittman's own Tiger was hit, a tank round penetrating the hull and igniting the on-board ammunition. The resulting explosion was powerful enough to blow off the whole turret. The entire crew was killed.

Nazi propaganda had already turned him into a hero back in the Reich for his exploits in Russia and Normandy, and his death in combat

# VILLERS-BOCAGE & NORMAN TERRAIN

**Normandy was a defender's dream in the summer of 1944. Much of its central and western terrain was made up of the famed bocage – a patchwork of ancient fields and orchards surrounded by dense, thick hedgerows built up over centuries by farmers clearing their fields of stones and rocks. In between them was a network of sunken lanes and tracks with little room for manoeuvre, leading to dozens of medieval villages built like fortresses with farmhouse walls several feet thick. The eastern part of Normandy was more open but was dominated by a few prominent pieces of high ground and several ridgelines that provided the defenders with excellent observation and fields of fire. It was this eastern end of the duchy where much of the Westheer's (the German Army in the West) armoured strength was concentrated.**

**Villers-Bocage itself, home to around 1,000 people at the time, sat atop one such piece of high ground near the River Odon, and more or less astride what was then the main road between Caen and Rennes away to the southwest: the Route Nationale 175. The panzer crews quickly adapted to the terrain, selecting well-camouflaged, hull-down primary positions with long fields of fire, and secondary positions on reverse slopes where attacking Allied armour would be silhouetted against the skyline. At all times it was only the panzers' thick frontal armour that would be exposed to enemy fire.**

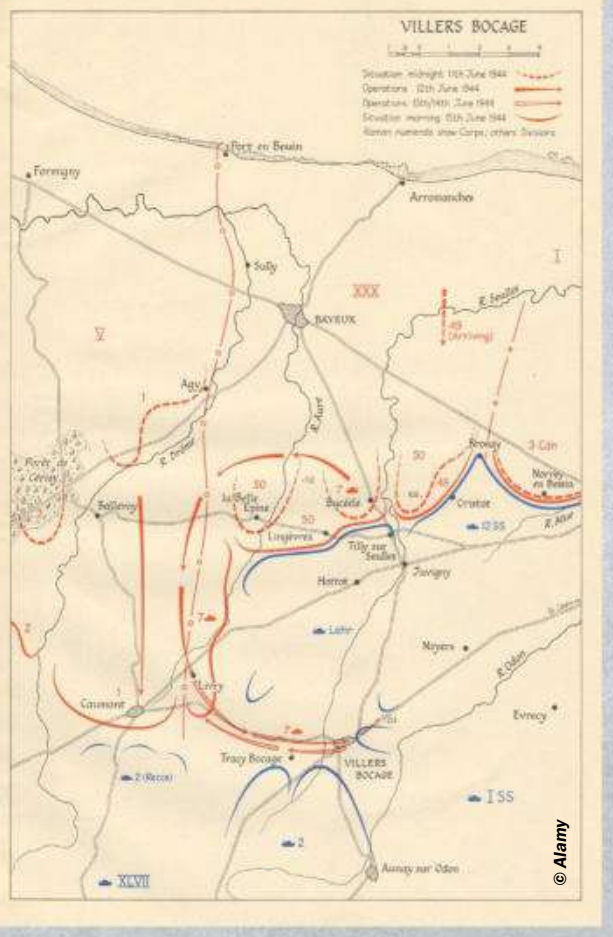
**Commander Richard von Rosen recalled: "Soon my panzer was receiving the first hits… my Tiger received a direct hit. We all felt the hefty blow, the lights failed and we were dazed for a few moments… [we were] surprised to find we were all still alive." The Tigers of his company then began pouring fire into the enemy: "Every round we fired hit a Sherman, which then burst into flames." No wonder the Sherman crews called their tanks 'Ronsons' given their propensity to catch fire when hit and incinerate the crew.**

*The Germans were able to utilise the terrain and prepared camouflage to ambush Allied formations*

*A British Cromwell Cruiser tank, knocked out during the Battle of Villers-Bocage, lays abandoned in the streets*

*A knocked out Panzer VI (Tiger I) and Panzer IV sit among the ruined streets of Villers-Bocage after the battle in June 1944*

*British engineers fill the wreck of a Tiger tank with landmines in order to destroy it, after the Allies recaptured the village of Villers-Bocage*




*A map of the Battle of Villers-Bocage, 1944*

Images: Bundesarchiv, Bild 101I-738-0275-09A / Zwilmer / Grimm, Arthur / CC-BY-SA 3.0 unless otherwise stated

only served to increase the mystique around him. Still only 30-years-old when he died Wittmann was lauded as one of Nazi Germany's top panzer aces, with Meyer declaring: "One hundred and thirty-eight enemy tanks had fallen victim to him."

However, since the end of the war Wittmann's record and legacy have been the subject of debate. It was – and is – notoriously difficult in combat to ascribe a particular tank kill to a specific tank, and the figure of 138 kills has been disputed, with a number of around 130 becoming the accepted sum. More contentious has been Wittmann's personal reputation, with the military historian Steven Zaloga describing him as "the hero of all Nazi fanboys".

There have also been questions from contemporary historians criticising both the lack of objectivity surrounding his military record and particularly his abilities as a panzer commander. Even his most famous action at Villers-Bocage has been questioned, with conflicting reports about both his decision to attack the town alone and how his own Tiger was put out of action. Why did Wittmann order his company to remain outside the town while he attacked the British spearhead single-handed in what could be described as an extremely foolhardy manner? The same question could be put to his final action at Saint-Aignan-de-Cramesnil where a lack of flank protection led to the failure of the attack and his own death.

**"THE TACTIC OF UNBROKEN ARTILLERY BARRAGES LASTING FOR HOURS WAS GRUESOME MENTAL AND PHYSICAL TORTURE"**

In the end Michael Wittmann can be assessed as a panzer commander who managed to amass an incredible tally of victories, the vast majority of which were scored on the Russian Front in 1943, even as Red Army superiority began to tell. Transferred west to face the impending Anglo-American landings in France he – like the rest of the Wehrmacht – faced an enemy which proved more than a match for them and his death, while not inevitable, was unsurprising given the Germans' appalling losses in the Normandy campaign.

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***Above:** LSSAH during the occupation of Milan, 1943*

***Above, right:** A Nazi propaganda poster for the LSSAH, 1941*

***Below:** LSSAH panzers on exercise in France, 1944*

© Alamy

# MEDIEVAL HELMETS

## HOW TO KEEP YOUR HEAD IN A FIGHT

Medieval European helmets were worn with full armour by knights and the wealthy, while other types were used by all ranks

WORDS **CHRISTOPHER GRAVETT**

*The death of King Harold in 1066 from the contemporary Bayeux Tapestry shows both Norman and English warriors wearing conical helmets with nose-guards. Many bear vertical lines suggesting either segmental construction or metal bands, although the horseman's wider band suggests the latter*

Over the centuries many different designs of helmet have been worn in combat. One type of that dated back to the late Roman period was the 'Spangenhelm'. It was made from a conical framework of iron or copper-alloy bands springing from a brow-band, inside of which were riveted plates of metal or horn. This shape provided a glancing surface, while a riveted nose-guard, or 'nasal', helped protect against slashing blows. Some helmets were made from riveted plates without the frame, others were raised from one piece of iron, sometimes with additional riveted bands.

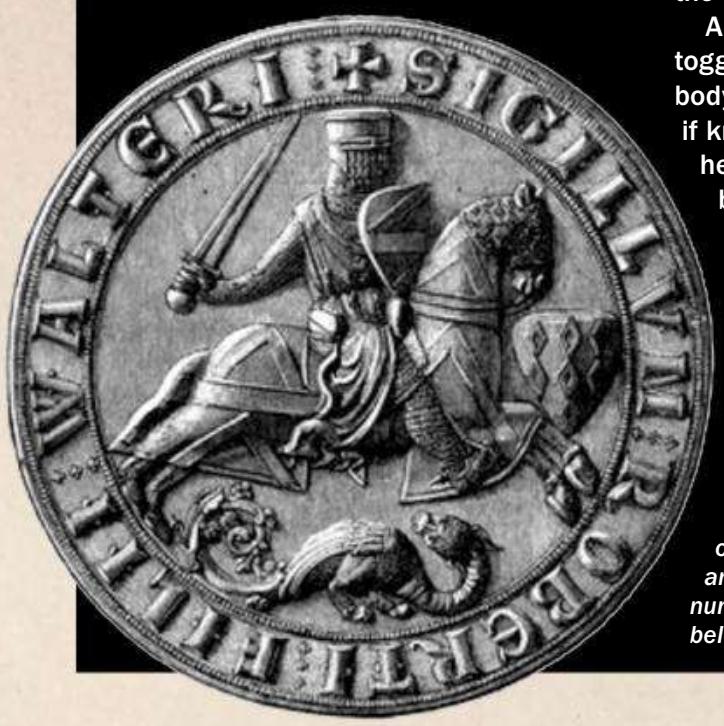
Most types of helmet described in this article would be fitted with a lining (usually canvas but sometimes more expensive materials) padded with hay, wool, cow hair or similar. Effigies and a few surviving helmets show linings cut into segments at the top and pierced for a draw-string so they could be adjusted to fit the head snugly and ensure the eyes lined up with the sights when the helmet was put on. Most helmets would be laced under the chin, often with two-point connections to the helmet to minimise movement. Some might use strap and buckle.

# THE HELM

By about 1180 round and then flat-topped forms of helmet had appeared. Already nasals with a short cross-bar over the mouth are occasionally seen, and this now extended to form a faceguard, rather like a welding mask, provided with sights and pierced with ventilation holes. Some helmets also now had a neck-guard, and already by 1200 the latter sometimes extended round the sides to join the faceguard and form the flat-topped cylindrical helm.

By the second half of the century the helm reached the shoulders and towards the end of the century became more conical. Illustrations from about 1300 onwards show how some had a hinged visor that pivoted up to allow more air to the face and better vision.

A cruciform slot accommodated a toggle from a chain attached to the body armour and prevented loss if knocked off in battle, or the helm could be slung over the back. The helm was used into the first half of the 14th century until it was generally relegated to the tournament.




***Left:** The seal of Baron Robert FitzWalter, about 1220, showing the flat-topped great helm now being worn over the mail coat and surcoat. There are numerous breathing holes below the sights*

# THE BASINET

In the 13th century a small round steel cap, the cervellière, was sometimes worn over or under the mail hood. By the early 14th century this was gradually being replaced by a new helmet, the basinet, and at first the helm might be worn over either helmet. The basinet initially appeared in several forms: one that covered the ears, one that came down to the shoulders (and with a visor looked like a great helm), and one that was conical and fitted just above the ears, suggesting it developed from the old conical helmet that had now gone out of fashion.

By mid-century these had given way to one form that was conical and covered the ears, which remained popular throughout Western Europe. The visor was often detachable, with each side arm held by a pin through a hinge. It developed flanges along the sights to protect them, while by 1380 the swollen 'nose' became drawn out to a deflecting snout often with a flanged slit like a mouth below, the 'hounskull' basinet. Ventilation holes were pierced more on the right side, since the left side was presented to an opponent and holes there could catch a weapon point. Instead of a visor, many mid-14th century Italian and German basinets had an iron nose-guard attached to the mail aventail, being drawn up and secured to the helmet brow, but it suffered from a lack of rigidity. A form of visor that appeared in about 1360 was the klappvisier which was seen mainly in German lands; it was attached by a single pivoting bar to the brow of the helmet.

Instead of being worn over a mail hood, basinets were increasingly furnished with a collar of mail (the 'aventail'} at first riveted inside the lower rim. Then the collar became hung from a leather or cloth strip cut with slits that fitted over a row of pierced studs ('vervelles') along the outer lower helmet edge, held in place by a cord threaded through the holes. The collar could thereby be removed for cleaning or repair.

Basinets might additionally have a plate throat defence called a 'bevor'. By 1400 full plate body armour was appearing, now often worn uncovered. Some basinets did away with the mail aventail, replacing it with a plate bevor and neck plates, and this was known as the great basinet. The visor was now becoming more rounded again. After about 1450 the great basinet was relegated to the tournament.

***Right:** A late 14th-century north Italian visored basinet with copper-alloy borders, the mail aventail attached via small rivets and was held by a cord. The visor can be removed with a pin either side; note the paucity of breathing holes on the left side – the shielded side ideally presented to an opponent. Royal Armouries Museum*

*All images © Alamy*

# THE ARMET

In early 15th-century Italy a new form of helmet was developing from the basinet: the armet. It was the typical head piece of the fully armoured equestrian knight throughout most of the 15th century and typifies the streamlined appearance of Italian armour. It had a more rounded bowl cut off, level with the ears but extending downwards at the rear to form a slim tail. This would guard the back of the neck.

Two shaped pivoting cheek-pieces extended down level with the latter, closing around the front of the face where they overlapped and were fastened by a stud. This left an opening for the nose and eyes, which was protected by a slightly pointed visor that came down over them. The sight was usually formed by the upper edge of the visor and lower edge of the helmet.

A protective bevor (also known as a 'wrapper'), which usually had two additional horizontal 'gorget plates' attached below it, was strapped over the lower front of the armet, having a notch cut out of the upper-right edge for the lifting peg of the visor. The wrapper is the most likely explanation for a feature of these helmets that appeared around 1440: a prong sticking out from the base of the neck with a disc attached, the idea being that the prong stopped the wrapper strap sliding down at the back. The disc may have given some protection to the buckle, or just been decorative. At about this time a brow reinforce was added to give extra protection to the forehead. A small mail aventail hung from each cheek-piece via a leather strip over vervelles, but from about 1460 a strip of metal was instead riveted over the leather.

*An early Italian armet, probably Milanese, with hinged cheek-pieces, brow-reinforce, detachable visor with lifting peg and copper-alloy pierced studs for attaching a mail aventail. The large disc is probably for guarding the wrapper buckle and strap. Stamped with the armourer's name: LIONARDO. Metropolitan Museum of Art*

# NOBLE DECORATION

All forms of helmet were at times painted, either all over or sometimes with bands, squares or devices. Early conical helmets might be studded with precious stones for the rich. From about 1300, basinets (and latterly sallets and armets) were often elaborately mounted in gold, silver, copper-gilt or copper-alloy, and some of these mounts were enamelled or jewelled. Steel could be burnished bright or be blued or blackened by heating.

For parades and tournaments some 15th-century Italian sallets were covered in colourful textiles mounted with decorative metal appliqués, especially in Venice, hence the term 'in the Venetian style'.

*A north Italian sallet covered in red velvet, with gilt rivets and fleur-de-lys decoration, from about 1470. Royal Armouries Museum*

# THE SALLET

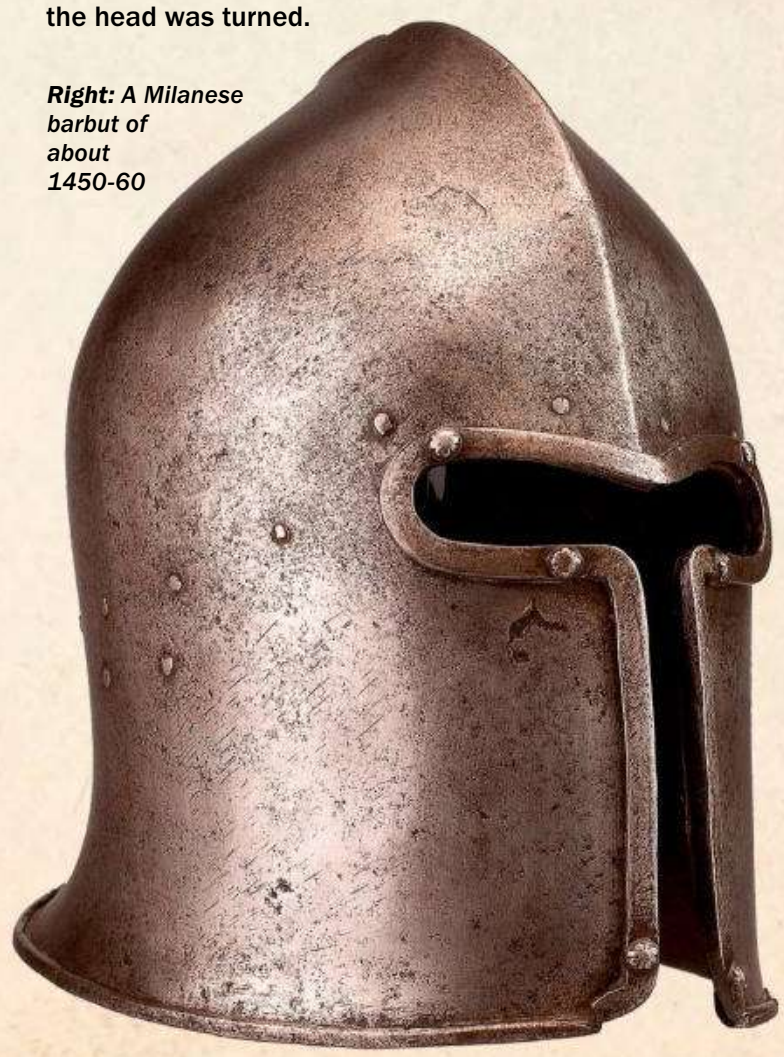
In early 15th-century Italy, forms of the basinet appear to have been modified to produce a more round-topped helmet covering the head, with a wide arched face opening and slightly drawn out tail, and sometimes a visor. This became known as the sallet, from the Italian 'celata'. A slightly conical form called the barbut emerged in about 1430 that reached to the shoulders, with the sides extending round to protect the cheeks, giving a 'T' shaped face opening. In some examples the sights were oval, the so-called Corinthian style, making them look like ancient Greek helmets. This type tended to disappear around 1470.

The sallet spread to north-western Europe, where it often had a pointed bowl. At first the visor barely covered the nose but by 1450 the bowl reduced in depth and became level with it. In about 1470 in German lands a kettle-hat with a sight cut into the brim was given a tail and merged with the Western European form of sallet to produce a distinctive German sallet: often deeper and with a straight lower edge and long tail, the so-called sou'wester form. Here some sallets had a visor with a sight formed from the upper edge of the visor and lower edge of the helmet brow; others simply had a sight cut into the front of the helmet, copying forms of kettle-hat.

To additionally protect the chin and throat many sallets often had a bevor with extra gorget plates attached to the lower edge, this being strapped round the neck or sometimes attached to the breastplate. Italian armourers often made 'export' sallets in the style of the country they were selling to.

At the end of the 15th century a few German sallets were made with a bevor that pivoted at the same points as the visor. Early in the 16th century versions were made with the neck shaped more closely and a bevor covering much of the face, requiring only a small visor. Known as the close helmet, before long it was so similar in shape to the armet that the only difference was in the way the helmets opened to put them on — the close helmet lifting out front to back and the armet opening at the sides. Some had their lower edges turned over so that, as they were closed, they engaged with the out-turned flange of a plate collar and locked over it, giving solid protection but enabling the neck to swivel on the flange as the head was turned.

***Right:** A Milanese barbut of about 1450-60*



*A mid-13th century battle featuring a variety of helmets: flat-topped helms, round-topped helmets with nose-guards, kettle-hats worn perhaps by knights and a cervellière worn by the archer*

# COMMON SOLDIER HELMETS

Certain styles of helmet were made for use by the wealthy. For example, the helm was primarily used by the knightly classes or their well-off followers. The great basinet, armet and close helmet were designed to be worn with full plate armour. Who might use other forms is less well defined and it must be remembered that spoils could be picked up on a battlefield. The early conical helmet was a universal shape used by all who were lucky enough to afford it. The cervellière could be used by all ranks, as could basic forms of the basinet.

In the 15th century open-faced sallets and skull-caps were also popular with soldiers, especially archers, because lacking a brim over the forehead it did not interfere with the string when the bow was at full draw. In Spain simple skull-caps were worn, and skull-caps with arched openings over the eyes became popular in that country. Other forms of sallet, being less confining than the armet, were also worn by light cavalry and foot soldiers and were pushed back when not needed.

One helmet style was particularly popular: the kettle-hat. In the mid-12th century a helmet appeared that was often slightly conical and was fitted with a broad brim. This was the chapel-de-fer, or kettle-hat, so-called from its resemblance to an upturned cauldron. It was often made like a 'Spangenhelm', from a framework with plates riveted inside and a brim added. From the second quarter of the 14th century it was usually made from one or several pieces of metal and was often quite deep. It proved useful in siege work as the wide brim could deflect missiles when climbing a scaling ladder. Even knights sometimes preferred it because it enabled air to reach the face and gave good vision. Its affordability also made it attractive for poorer knights. Some kettle-hats were worn with bevors, except in Italy.

The kettle-hat was so popular that it endured throughout the medieval period and into the Tudor period, with cheek-pieces added; in the 17th century it evolved into the pikeman's pot in the English Civil Wars. It reappeared in 1914 as the British infantry 'tin hat' and was used again as the 'battle bowler' by the British in World War II — quite a respectable run!

# HOW DID TOURNAMENT HELMETS DIFFER?

At first tournaments were like small battles but by the 14th century individual jousts with lances had become popular. The helm was usually worn, but the blunted lances and jagged splinters of broken shafts posed a real threat. There were efforts to increase protection for the eyes: from about 1350 the plate below the eyes had begun to jut forwards slightly, the sights losing some lateral width and also the central vertical bar.

Sometimes an additional plate bevor was strapped over this lower faceplate, while some others instead had a permanently riveted reinforce on the left side (where the opponent was attacking from). As well as thickening the metal, by about 1400 the lower jutting plate had begun to curve forward away from the eyes, which gave rise to the name 'frog-mouthed' jousting helm. This feature made it virtually impossible for a lance point to slide up the lower part of the helm to enter the sight. The helm had grown deeper and was now fastened down at front and back, first by straps then by hasps or screws, to prevent the head being flung back by the impact of a lance strike. The usual padded lining of German helms had by the late medieval period become an internal suspension system of straps and laces to keep the wearer's head from hitting the inside of the helmet. Great basinets continued in use for foot combat. A special form of combat was sometimes seen in the 15th century: a version of the mounted mêlée called the club tourney. As the name suggests it was fought with wooden clubs or blunted swords and the helmets used were great basinets, often of leather, with a metal barred face-guard.

*A German illustration (c.1500) of a frog-mouthed helm for the Gestech, a joust run with blunt lances. The helm was screwed down to the plate breast and backplates. Here the straps and laces of the internal padded cap are clearly visible.*



# HELMET CRESTS

Crests formed part of a knight's personal arms. They appeared on the helm in the late-12th century as fan-shaped pieces, three-dimensional devices or even miniature pennons. Crests or horns (especially in German lands) often of moulded boiled leather (cuir bouilli), parchment or sometimes whalebone only became common after about 1300. The fixing points were disguised by a circlet of twisted silk round the top of the helmet, often in the two main colours of a knight's coat-of-arms, or a crown or coronet for men of rank. From the 14th century barons and higher ranks had a cap of maintenance.

Some helmets had a cloth mantling hanging down the back, which may have helped protect the steel from the sun's heat. By the 14th century it was becoming obvious that crests provided a convenient handle to pull a knight from his saddle, and along with the helm they were generally relegated to the tournament field. Feathers had sometimes been worn and now ostrich or pheasant feathers were fixed in a plume holder on various helmets.

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# THE DEMISE OF BRAVO TWO ZERO

Images © Alamy

During the 1991 Gulf War, an SAS operation in the Iraqi desert went terribly wrong

WORDS MICHAEL E HASKEW

The situation began to unravel from the start. They were trained to complete their missions against long odds, operating behind enemy lines – but when communications could not be established and their presence was apparently discovered there was no choice but to abort, exfiltrate and attempt to fight another day.

The eight-man team of B Squadron 22 SAS, known as Bravo Two Zero, had deployed hours earlier into the trackless Iraqi desert, then began an incredible and tragic odyssey, the circumstances of which are still debated more than 30 years later.

## Prelude to deployment

When Saddam Hussein sent the Iraqi Army into Kuwait on 2 August 1990, condemnation from the community of nations was virtually unanimous and a coalition force from 35 countries assembled to deal with the dictator's aggression against his neighbour. During the build-up for Operation Desert Storm, SAS formations deployed to forward operating bases in Saudi Arabia. They brought with them expertise in the covert operations that were deemed essential to the offensive to eject the Iraqis from Kuwait, which began on 17 January 1991.

Founded during WWII as an elite special forces unit of the British Army, the SAS was renowned for its highly skilled fighting capabilities. More recently, 22 SAS had gained global attention after their rescue of hostages from the Iranian Embassy siege in London in 1980. During the opening days of Desert Storm several apparent threats to coalition personnel were identified, and 22 SAS were detailed to eliminate – or at least impair – the ability of the Iraqis to launch tactical ballistic missiles, or Scuds, which were capable of delivering high-explosive warheads against both military and civilian targets. Bravo Two Zero, one of three SAS teams with similar missions, were inserted into the Iraqi desert on the night of 22-23 January.

## Scud hunters

The team consisted of its commander, Sergeant Steven Billy Mitchell, second-in-command Sergeant Vince David Phillips, Corporal Colin Armstrong, Lance Corporal Ian Robert 'Dinger' Pring, and Troopers Robert Consiglio, Steven 'Legs' Lane, Malcolm MacGown and Mike 'Kiwi' Coburn (a pseudonym). Detailed planning was essential to the success of their mission, and on its face the task was daunting.

Numerous aspects of the Bravo Two Zero saga have been disputed, and members of the team have even put forth different interpretations of the mission itself. According to Sergeant Mitchell, writing under the pseudonym Andy McNab, the objective was to seek and destroy Iraqi Scud launchers along a 250km stretch of the Iraqi Army's main supply route. However, Corporal Armstrong, writing as Chris Ryan, asserted that the team's objective was to find a suitable lying-up position, gather intelligence, and monitor the movements of enemy troops and Scud launchers.

Regardless, key decisions were made that heavily influenced the outcome of the mission. Although each SAS member was assigned to carry a load of equipment and supplies estimated to weigh at least 95kg, the team chose not to utilise vehicles since their numbers were few, the vehicles themselves were small and their usefulness would be limited in an operation that was to be conducted from a fixed position.

## Mission and misstep

In the predawn darkness, Bravo Two Zero were inserted by Chinook helicopter into the desert

**"ADRENALINE RUSHED, BLOOD PUMPED. WE STOPPED. WE COULDN'T GO FORWARD, WE COULDN'T GO BACK – AND WE WERE PROBABLY NO MORE THAN SECONDS AWAY FROM CONTACT..."**

Image: Wiki / PD / Fair use

***Above:** The SAS men of Bravo Two Zero pose before their ill-fated mission*

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

***Below:** Soldiers examine the remnants of a Scud missile during the 1991 Gulf War*

320km behind enemy lines and northwest of the Iraqi capital Baghdad. Accounts differ as to how far the men walked that night, but temperatures were unusually cold.

"We found a perfect lying-up place," McNab (Mitchell) wrote in his 1993 bestseller *Bravo Two Zero*. "Dead ground, out of sight and with cover from enemy fire… It was time to transmit our first Sit Rep (situation report) back to SAS base camp in Saudi, telling them where we were and what state we were in. On the patrol radio, Legs, our signaller, sent the encoded message in a single, very short burst… We waited for the acknowledgment, but none came… If the SAS base didn't hear from you, the rule was that you trekked back to the landing site and rendezvoused at a set time with a helicopter to pick up new radios."

Unknown to the team, their messages were being received at the base, but they were unable to receive any communications in return.

The following morning, an Iraqi shepherd boy stumbled across the Bravo Two Zero hiding place. McNab realised their cover was blown, and the team began to move south towards the expected helicopter rendezvous point. He asserted in 1993 that the patrol soon met a formidable force of Iraqi troops and armoured personnel carriers, and though later investigations cast some doubt on his account, McNab wrote of a fierce firefight:

"We pulled our scarves over our faces and set out, making good progress with the sun in our eyes until suddenly we heard the sound of more tracked vehicles. Adrenaline rushed, blood pumped. We stopped. We couldn't go forward, we couldn't go back – and we were probably no more than seconds away from contact… 'Let's do it!' I yelled… Rounds thumped into the ground, getting closer and closer to where I lay. A truck stopped 100 yards away and infantry were spilling out shouting and firing… We were now all furiously getting rounds off. One of our rockets hit a truck and there was a massive shudder of high-explosive… Mark and Dinger reached one of the Iraqi APCs, found the rear doors carelessly left open and lobbed in a grenade. The occupants were killed instantly."

When the slugfest was over, scores of Iraqi soldiers lay dead on the ground; others were seriously wounded. Miraculously, none of the SAS men had been injured. When the team reassembled, McNab attempted to contact the AWACS surveillance aircraft, but his tactical distress beacon (TACBE) received no response. Further, an RAF Chinook dispatched to extricate the team at the anticipated rendezvous point was forced to turn back. McNab then decided to move northwest towards the Syrian border rather than south towards Saudi Arabia. The Syrian frontier was closer and perhaps even an alternative discussed prior to the mission. However, the deviation from the planned southern trek may well have nullified any further attempts to locate and recover the SAS team.

**"WHEN THE SLUGFEST WAS OVER, SCORES OF IRAQI SOLDIERS LAY DEAD ON THE GROUND; OTHERS WERE SERIOUSLY WOUNDED. MIRACULOUSLY, NONE OF THE SAS MEN HAD BEEN INJURED"**

## Evasion, capture and death

During the night of 24 January, as McNab attempted to contact the AWACS, the eight-man group became separated. While five waited for TACBE confirmation, Phillips, MacGown and Ryan (Armstrong) continued moving towards the Syrian border. Phillips soon began to suffer the effects of hypothermia, and hours later he died of exposure to the bitter cold. Around noon on 26 January, MacGown and Ryan encountered

*Bravo Two Zero commander Andy McNab (Sergeant Mitchell) hides his identity from the camera*

© Alamy

**The One That Got Away** *author and Bravo Two Zero survivor Chris Ryan addresses an audience*

© Alamy

© Alamy

***Above:** Actor Sean Bean starred in the 1999 Bravo Two Zero television production*

# BRAVO TWO ZERO BECOMES LEGEND

## BOOKS AND TELEVISION ADAPTATIONS HAVE BROUGHT BRAVO TWO ZERO FAME – AND ADDITIONAL SCRUTINY

In addition to McNab's (Mitchell) 1993 book *Bravo Two Zero* and Ryan's (Armstrong) 1995 work *The One That Got Away*, Peter Ratcliffe, the SAS regimental sergeant major at the time of the operation, wrote *Eye Of The Storm* in 2000, a memoir that also introduces contradictory information about the abortive mission. In 2001, former SAS Trooper Michael Asher travelled to Iraq and conducted numerous interviews with witnesses while retracing the Bravo Two Zero patrol route. His book, *The Real Bravo Two Zero*, which is largely at odds with the accounts of McNab and Ryan, was published the following year. Trooper Mike 'Kiwi' Coburn also wrote a book, *Soldier Five*, published in 2004.

"I wanted to portray events as they really happened," Coburn said in reference to other accounts of the mission, in particular labelling some of what McNab and Ryan wrote as fiction. "You can't have all this rubbish out there." The Ministry of Defence failed in its attempt to suppress Coburn's book but has received all of the proceeds from its sales.

The BBC, ITV and Channel 4 have all produced documentaries based on the accounts of the SAS survivors of Bravo Two Zero and those who subsequently sought to shed light on the events.

***Below: The BBC's dramatisation of McNab's account brought the tale to a massive audience***

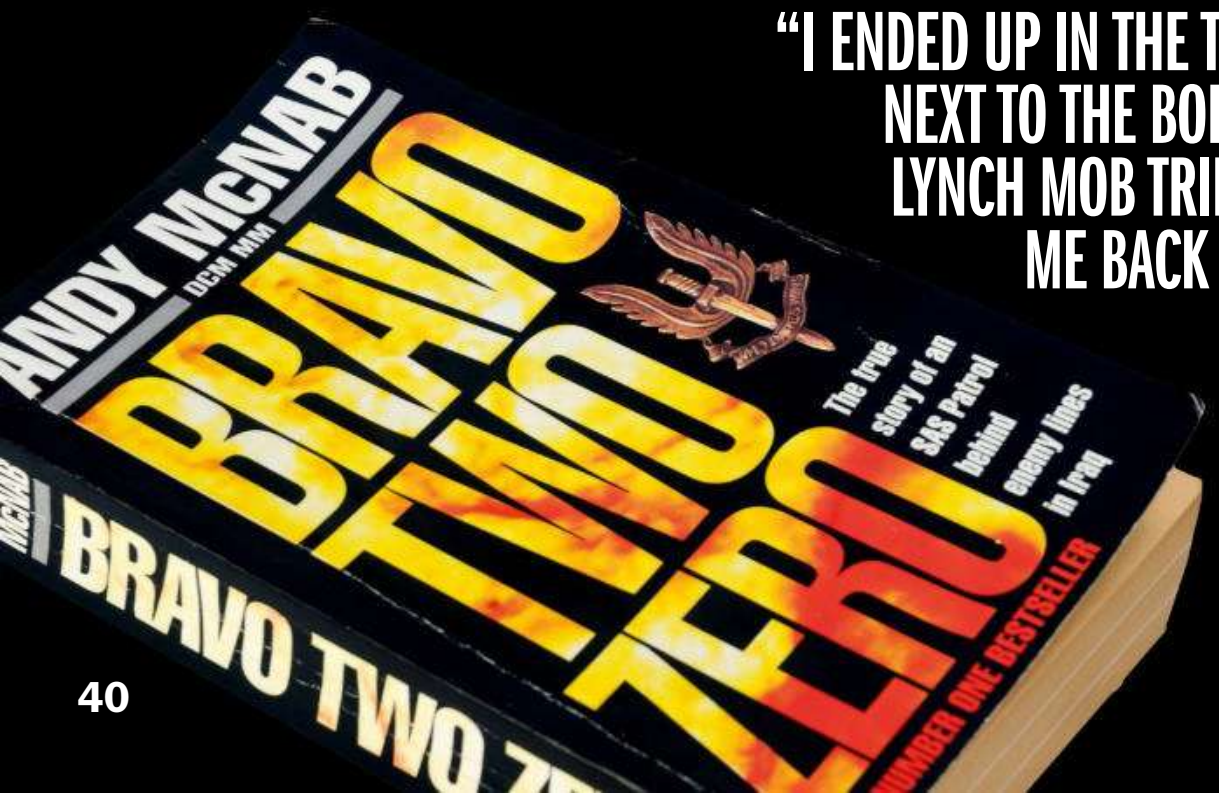
*A Chinook inserted the team into the desert, but the one headed for the rendezvous point had to turn back*

an elderly goat herder. Rather than killing the old man, they decided that MacGown would go with him and attempt to locate a vehicle while Ryan remained behind, anticipating contact with MacGown in a few hours. Ryan later reported that MacGown came upon several men with a Toyota Land Cruiser, shot one individual as he ran towards it, and then gunned down another pair. Out of ammunition and unable to flee in the Toyota, he was captured.

McNab's account of MacGown's skirmish differs from that of Ryan, but it is only one of many contradictions.

Meanwhile, McNab's group hijacked a taxi and drove some distance to an Iraqi checkpoint, where Lane reportedly shot one sentry while two more were killed by other members of the SAS team. Again, Ryan contradicts McNab, and further investigation years later failed to confirm the actual sequence of events. Subsequently, it is known that Consiglio was killed by hostile fire during a confrontation with local police and civilians in the early hours of 27 January. Lane and Pring swam the Euphrates River that morning, and Lane died of hypothermia a short time later. Coburn was wounded in the arm and ankle. In short order, the three survivors of McNab's group were taken prisoner.

**"I ENDED UP IN THE TOWN RIGHT NEXT TO THE BORDER AND A LYNCH MOB TRIED TO DRAG ME BACK INTO IRAQ"**


ANDY McNAB
DCM MM
BRAVO TWO ZERO
The true story of an SAS Patrol behind enemy lines in Iraq
NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER
BRAVO TWO ZE

*Andy McNab's bestseller, chronicling his experience with Bravo Two Zero, stirred controversy*

## Ryan's incredible journey

Ryan, however, remained at large. In fact, he began an incredible trek of approximately 290km to the Syrian frontier and safety, the longest such journey undertaken by an SAS trooper – or perhaps any soldier – in history. However, as with so many other aspects of the Bravo Two Zero mission, Ryan's account remains the subject of scrutiny and conjecture to this day.

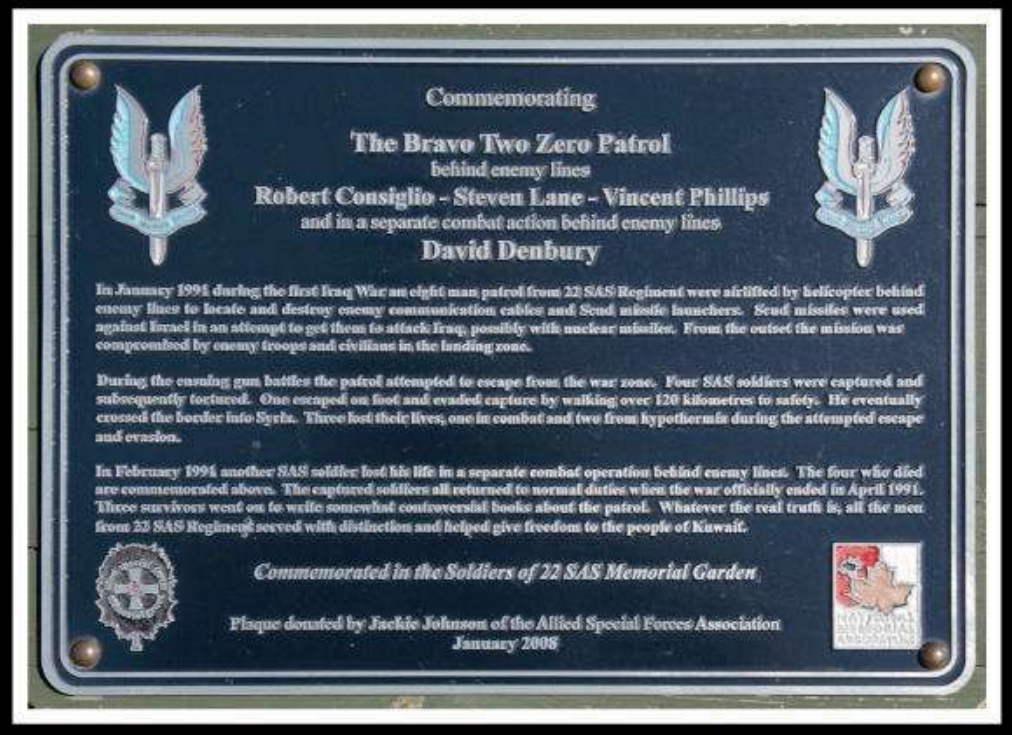
During a harrowing week, Ryan maintains, he crossed the desert towards Syria. Surviving the bone-chilling cold each night, he had to find water. But when he came upon a pool and drank, his throat burned and he retched. The creek he had drawn from was downstream from an Iraqi nuclear facility

*The Bravo Two Zero Patrol Memorial bench is located at the Allied Special Forces Memorial Grove, National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, UK*

***Below:** This memorial to Sergeant Vince Phillips of Bravo Two Zero is located at the National Memorial Arboretum*

We are the Pilgrims, master
We shall go Always a little further
1983 1991
This tree seat is dedicated in memory of Vince PHILLIPS, a member of Bravo Two Zero patrol who tragically lost his life in January 1991 whilst serving with 22 SAS Regiment behind enemy lines during the first Gulf War. His courage and that of all others who fought, helped free the people of Kuwait from abject slavery.
2006

***Below:** Bravo Two Zero's plaque at the National Memorial Arboretum is dedicated to those who lost their lives in the mission*


Commemorating
The Bravo Two Zero Patrol
behind enemy lines
Robert Consiglio - Steven Lane - Vincent Phillips
and in a separate combat action behind enemy lines
David Denbury
In January 1991 during the first Iraq War an eight man patrol from 22 SAS Regiment were airlifted by helicopter behind enemy lines to locate and destroy enemy communication cables and Scud missile launchers. Scud missiles were used against Israel in an attempt to get them to attack Iraq, possibly with nuclear missiles. From the outset the mission was compromised by enemy troops and civilians in the landing zone.
During the ensuing gun battles the patrol attempted to escape from the war zone. Four SAS soldiers were captured and subsequently tortured. One escaped on foot and evaded capture by walking over 120 kilometres to safety. He eventually crossed the border into Syria. Three lost their lives, one in combat and two from hypothermia during the attempted escape and evasion.
In February 1994 another SAS soldier lost his life in a separate combat operation behind enemy lines. The four who died are commemorated above. The captured soldiers all returned to normal duties when the war officially ended in April 1991. Three survivors went on to write somewhat controversial books about the patrol. Whatever the real truth is, all the men from 22 SAS Regiment served with distinction and helped give freedom to the people of Kuwait.
Commemorated in the Soldiers of 22 SAS Memorial Garden
Plaque donated by Jackie Johnson of the Allied Special Forces Association
January 2008

All images © Alamy

and had been contaminated with a toxic substance known as 'yellowcake'.

In February 2021, he explained to Forces News: "For the last three nights I had nothing and I was walking about 40 kilometres a night. I started hallucinating and seeing visions of my daughter. It was that vivid I was putting my hand out to get a hold of her and she was talking to me."

Near the end of his ordeal, Ryan had lost 17kg and stumbled into the village of Abu Kamal, Syria. In 1995, he wrote an account of his ordeal entitled *The One That Got Away*, and he told his story to the *Daily Star* in 2018. "Every day, I would lie there and plan my route to get closer and closer to that Syrian border," he recalled. "All I thought for the seven days was 'Get across that border and I'll be safe' – but actually I wasn't. I ended up in the town right next to the border and a lynch mob tried to drag me back into Iraq."

Ryan managed to reach the local police station, but his fate remained unclear for a time as several men hustled him into a vehicle. "Driving in the car, we passed this large sign which said 'Baghdad' and the guys said, 'We're Iraqis.' They blindfolded me and I thought I'd been tricked, heading towards an Iraqi prison. As I sat there, I started running through in my head what would happen next. I'd get beaten up and interrogated, so it wasn't a surprise. As it was, they were having a joke and took me into Damascus."

Ryan added that the Syrians were gracious hosts and even bought him a suit before turning him over to the British Embassy. He received the Military Medal for his exploits, despite the fact that suspicions regarding his story linger.

McNab, MacGown, Pring and Coburn were moved on several occasions during their six weeks of captivity and spent part of that time in the infamous Abu Ghraib prison. The Bravo Two Zero team leader told a tale of excruciating physical torture and mental anguish. A few times McNab and Pring were able to make eye contact and encourage one another to keep going through winks and faint smiles. Still, McNab wrote, their captors were utterly brutal.

"As the kicks connected with my skull, there was a hissing, popping sound in my ears, and as I clenched my jaw I heard the bones creak together," he recalled. "I felt blood trickle out of my ears and down my face. I was worried I'd be left permanently deaf… They set at me with rifle butts and one particularly heavy blow caught me on the jaw. I felt my molars crack and splinter, and when the pain hit me I was down and screaming my head off.

"And so my ordeal went on and on, day after day, night after night. At one point we were driven out onto the streets and exhibited to roaring crowds of people – women with sticks, men with guns or stones, all waving pictures of Saddam Hussein."

McNab, MacGown and Pring were eventually released in early March, a few days after the Gulf War had ended. McNab received the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and Lane and Consiglio the Military Medal.

While there is no doubt that the brave SAS men of Bravo Two Zero engaged in their deployment with determination to complete their mission, a series of unforeseen circumstances converged to create the ensuing catastrophe. Although their heroism cannot be denied, the accounts of those who participated and those who investigated reveal statements, eyewitness testimonies and theories that raise questions that may never be fully answered.

# WASHINGTON

# AMERICA'S FIRST COMMANDER IN CHIEF

*A Founding Father, military hero of the revolution and the nation's first president – but how much of his story is fact, and how much fiction?*

WORDS **DAVID SMITH**

When it came to choosing a commander to lead an armed uprising against the British, unity was very much on the minds of the American colonies. Resistance to British rule had not yet escalated into a demand for independence, but a large army had formed at Boston, penning in the smaller British forces. It came mostly from the northern colonies, especially those known collectively as New England.

George Washington, from a solid Virginia family, was seen as a man who could encourage greater participation from the middle and southern colonies. The commander in chief would need to be more than a general: he would need to be a symbol of resistance and, as unrest turned into revolution, he would have to inspire and lead an amateur army against a far more experienced foe.

Washington, standing at around six-foot-two, fitted the bill for a physically imposing figurehead – but he would prove to be far more. From 1775 he led America's fledgling army, through near-calamitous defeats and desperate shortages of supplies, to victory. His service was recognised and rewarded when he became the first president of the United States in 1789, six years after he had led his young nation to independence.

## The young Washington

Washington was born into a comfortable world on 22 February, 1732. His family were plantation owners at Popes Creek in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Little is known of his childhood except for the fact that his father died when George was just 11. His older half-brothers were educated in England but George did not go to college, although he was taught the principles of surveying, which would come in useful when leading an army.

His military education began when he served as a regional militia adjutant, and in 1753 he was given the important task of warning the French against constructing forts on land claimed by Virginia. This mission, known as the Allegheny Expedition, gave Washington something of a reputation, as his account was published and widely read.

His first taste of action was a sobering experience: he was forced to surrender to superior French forces at Fort Necessity in July 1754 in an incident that helped precipitate the French and Indian War. The following year Washington had a front-row seat to a defeat on an entirely different scale.

**"WASHINGTON, STANDING AT AROUND SIX-FOOT-TWO, FITTED THE BILL FOR A PHYSICALLY IMPOSING FIGUREHEAD, BUT HE WOULD PROVE TO BE FAR MORE"**

Serving as a special aide to General Edward Braddock, Washington saw how a large, well-disciplined force could be overwhelmed by a smaller number of irregular troops, especially when fighting in heavily wooded terrain.

Braddock had led his 1,450-strong column without incident for three weeks en route to the French-held Fort Duquesne when they were ambushed by less than 800 men – Native American warriors, and French and Canadian irregulars. In the confused fighting that followed, Braddock's men were comprehensively beaten, giving birth to the notion that irregular frontier fighters would always be superior to 'robotic' European regulars.

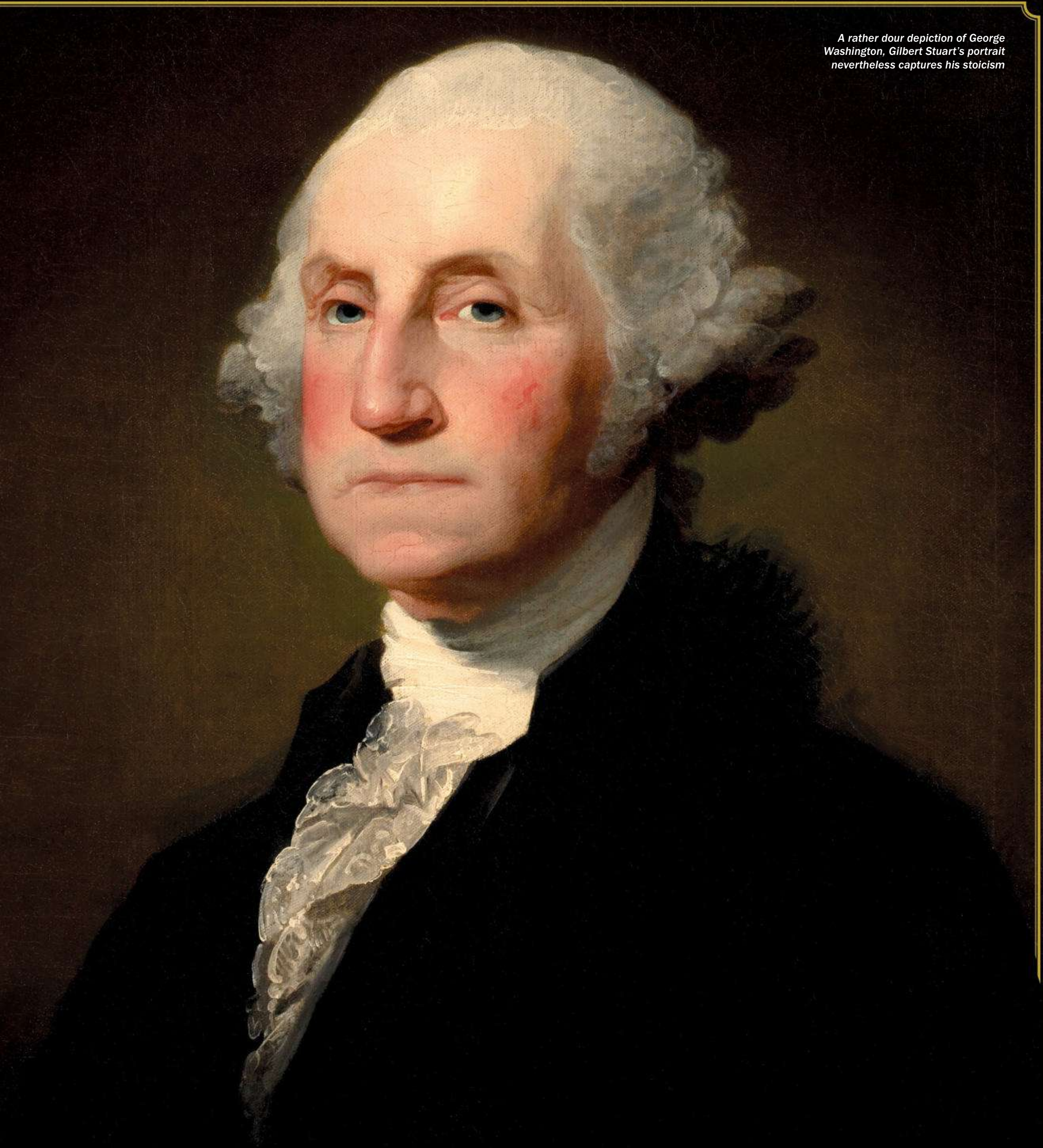
Washington fought with bravery at the battle and, just as importantly, escaped with his life. Afterwards he was given command of Virginia's frontier forces and his regiment became highly respected, although repeated efforts to get it accepted into the regular British ranks were unsuccessful.

When it came to war with the mother country, Washington was well-placed to lead his nation's army. He had seen the British in action and had a good understanding of both their strengths and their weaknesses.

## The road to revolution

Washington was fundamentally opposed to the efforts made by Britain to tighten control over the 13 colonies, so it was a natural progression for him to support the move to armed resistance as the situation deteriorated. He was a strong candidate to be given command of the newly formed Continental Army, but not the only one. In particular, the former British officer Charles Lee believed he was the perfect man to command and he would be a thorn in Washington's side after he was snubbed.

Washington took command of an army that had the British penned in at Boston. His first task was to navigate a tricky period when enlistments ran out at the end of 1775 and a new army had to be raised, all while maintaining a grip on Boston. This was no mean feat, and its accomplishment was a major mark in Washington's favour. He realised from the start that he was not merely a soldier – he had to keep together disparate



*A rather dour depiction of George Washington, Gilbert Stuart's portrait nevertheless captures his stoicism*

*Image: Wiki / PD / Art*

elements from multiple colonies and was effectively commanding a coalition force, with all the political problems that entailed.

Morale was high when he took over following the Battle of Bunker Hill. American forces had taken control of an area of high ground overlooking Boston (it was actually Breed's Hill that was fortified and defended) and then inflicted huge casualties on the British troops sent to reclaim it. Such morale-boosting actions were, however, to prove scarce during Washington's period in command and he expended most of his energy trying to keep a disintegrating army together through increasingly trying times.

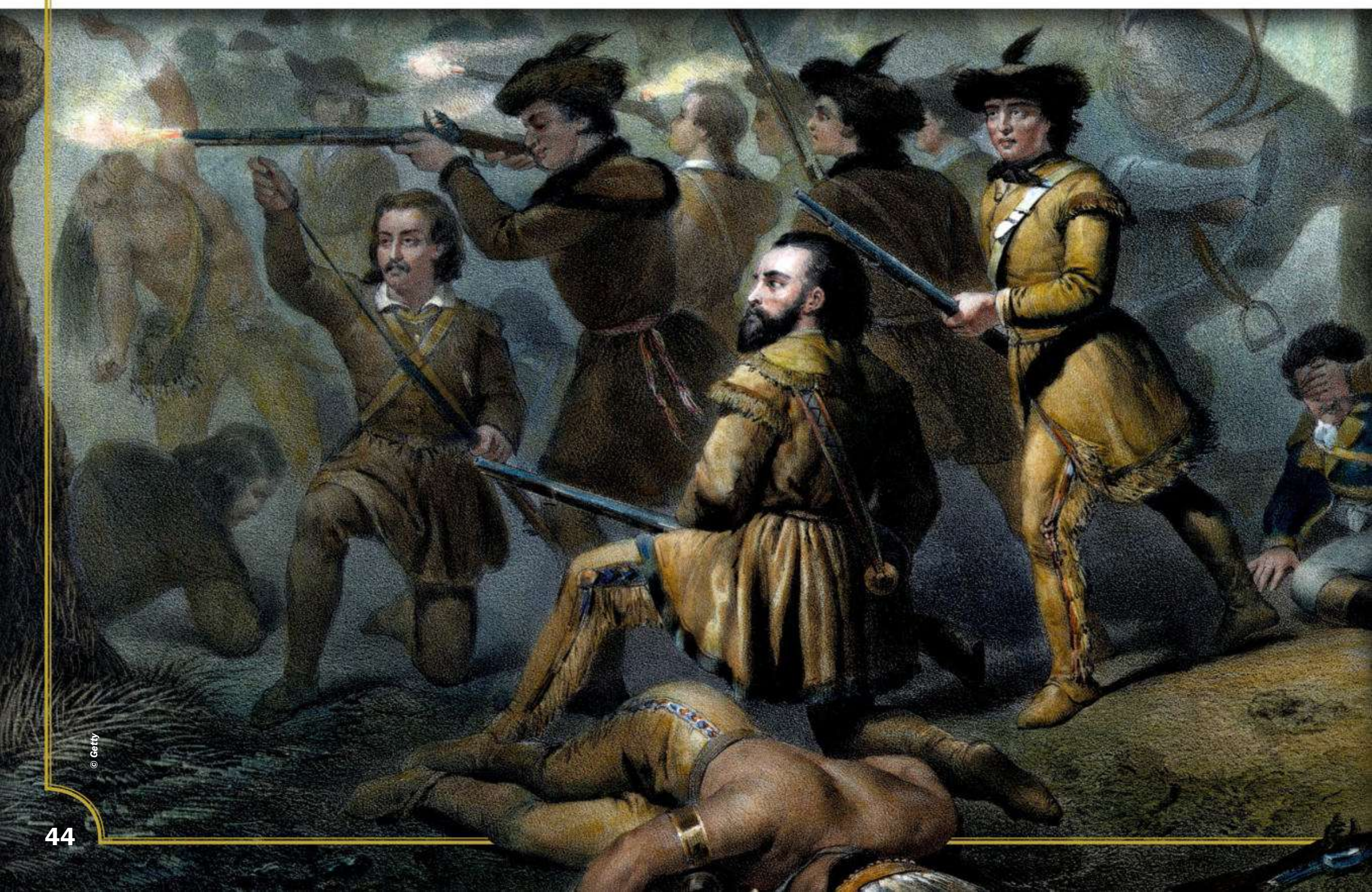
## The first phase of the war

After the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776 and the commencement of open warfare, Washington's initial instinct was to take on the British at their own game. He believed that only by defeating them in the field in a major set-piece battle could the Americans assert their will and win their independence. With this in mind, he was keen to build an army along the same lines as that fielded by the British, and he wanted to fight in the same linear battlefield formations.

The problem with this form of warfare was that he simply did not have the men necessary to implement it. There was no shortage of bravery, but standing in ranks to exchange musket volleys required long and tedious drills to make the movements of reloading and firing almost automatic. Only then could troops remain calm under fire.

*Washington cuts a dashing figure in his colonel's uniform from his days commanding the Virginia Regiment*

Image: Wiki / PD / Art



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Washington therefore staked everything on tackling the British head-on when they launched their first major offensive of the war, in August 1776. Large numbers of reinforcements had been sent out to the British commander, General William Howe, including thousands of German hirelings known collectively as Hessians.

Against the more experienced Howe, Washington's men were swept aside at the Battle of Long Island and were lucky to escape back to New York with acceptable losses.

Washington then offered battle again, from fortified positions on the Harlem Heights on Manhattan, but succeeded only in triggering a fairly minor skirmish. Once more he drew up behind defensive works at White Plains, but again he could not tempt the wary British to commit to a full-scale attack.

By now Washington was learning that a decisive battle might not be the best option for his men at this stage of the war. He had proved unable to lure the British into another assault on prepared positions, and taking the offensive on a large scale was out of the question with his inexperienced men.

In correspondence, he was often highly critical of his soldiers, writing to Congress on 2 September: "Till of late I had no doubt in my mind of defending this place [New York], nor should I have yet, if the men would do their duty, but this I despair of." Washington's words were harsh, and not completely fair, as his men had been badly let down by their commanding officer on Long Island.

At the same time, he was learning about his opponent – the capable but slow-moving Howe. With Howe so ponderous, Washington did not need to resort to desperate measures to slow down the progress of the British forces, and he also recognised that pressure was building on the British commander, commenting: "For what has he done as yet with his great army?"

Washington was still instinctively aggressive and would have preferred to fight an active war, but he was coming around to the idea that simply keeping his army intact could be almost as effective as a major victory. Just as the war seemed to be settling into a predictable and rather comfortable pattern, however, the British shifted gear dramatically in November, capturing Fort Washington in an overwhelming assault and taking close to 3,000 prisoners. It was a hammer blow and taught Washington a valuable lesson about leaving sizeable detachments in static positions.

For the time being, though, he was more concerned with keeping the remnants of his army out of reach of the British. He withdrew across the Delaware River and when Howe declined to follow him, it looked as though the first campaign of the war was over.

## Taking Trenton

Washington now took a calculated gamble. Knowing the embers of the revolution were fading fast, and with just a few thousand men left under his command, he mounted a daring raid on the Hessian-held outpost of Trenton. Crossing the freezing Delaware once more, he took the garrison by surprise and secured his most impressive victory of the entire war.

The attack on Trenton highlighted Washington's traits as a general at this stage. Recognising the strategic need to strike some sort of blow at the end of a disastrous campaign was important, as was planning a move against a well-defended enemy outpost, in terrible conditions. He showed ambition, and it could easily have turned into a disaster – two of the three columns he organised to take part in the raid actually failed to cross the Delaware. This highlighted another of his qualities: a tendency to overcomplicate matters when taking the offensive.

Running behind schedule after the difficult river crossing, he could easily have decided to call the whole thing off, but he displayed another character trait – determination and a willingness to take risks.

His reward was a complete rethinking of the war on the part of Howe, whose reaction was out of all proportion to the defeat endured at Trenton. In the

***Below:** Washington is depicted taking command after the fall of Braddock at the Battle of the Monongahela*

following campaign, Howe abandoned the original British strategy of taking control of the Hudson River and instead did little more than capture the rebel capital of Philadelphia.

Washington did not want to give up the capital – he staged a determined defence but was unable to match Howe's strength in a full-scale engagement and suffered defeat at the Battle of Brandywine. But this was not a conventional war where the capture of a capital automatically brought the two parties to the negotiating table; the rebel army was a far more important symbol of the revolution than any city and Washington, by preserving it, was keeping the revolution alive. The British, however, were not his only enemies.

## Intrigues and plots

Washington had faced serious opposition for the position of commander in chief and his mediocre performance before the Battle of Trenton had caused some to question his fitness to continue in the job.

Charles Lee had become surly under Washington's command, and at one point even dragged his feet while bringing a division of the army to link up with him. Lee's intentions may have been to undermine Washington and replace him, but his sluggish movement backfired when he was captured by the British.

Just as he was about to launch his raid on Trenton, Washington also learned that General Horatio Gates was heading to Congress to argue that American forces should be withdrawn to the southern states – a clear criticism of Washington's performance in the north.

Trenton bought Washington some time, but in 1777 the pressure on him grew again. At Saratoga, Gates won a decisive victory against General John Burgoyne, capturing an entire British army and triggering more calls for Washington to be replaced. It was a difficult time for the commander in chief, as the British reassessed their war effort after the disaster at Saratoga. With the French entering the war on the side of the Americans, Britain switched focus to the southern states, as well as the West Indies, and for the best part of three years Washington appeared to do little more than keep an eye on the British garrison at New York.

This would be an unfair assessment, though, as he was always looking for an opportunity to strike. When the British abandoned Philadelphia in 1778 and pulled all their forces back to New York, Washington saw an opportunity to stage a limited offensive at the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse. He had recently been rejoined by Lee, a prisoner of the British since his capture at the end of the 1776 campaign, and his relationship with the former British officer was anything but harmonious.

Washington had seen a letter in which Lee openly criticised him, and Lee performed poorly at Monmouth, drawing Washington's ire. The commander in chief then took control of the army, repulsing a British counterattack and earning plaudits for a securing a solid draw with his enemy.

From this point, Washington's biggest problems lay in keeping his army in the north supplied and fed, while the fighting shifted to the south, under different generals. He performed admirably in keeping his force intact and when the opportunity came to strike again he was ready to seize it.

***Right:** A war bonds poster from the Second World War is testament to Washington's enduring legend*

***Below:*** Washington Crossing the Delaware *by Emanuel Leutze, 1851. The painting documents Washington's crossing of the Delaware River on the night of December 25-26, 1776*

Images © Getty

Image: Wiki / PD / Art

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***Above-left:** Although Yorktown was on a larger scale, Washington's victory at Trenton was the most audacious success of his military career*

***Above-right:** The commander in chief fires a cannon during the Siege of Yorktown, the battle that won the war for the Americans*

***Above:** Washington's childhood home, on the Rappahannock River*

## The end of the war

An American force of both regular troops and militia had cornered Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown in the summer of 1781. The British commander had worn out his small army in a series of victories and now needed either resupply or evacuation. This, Washington realised, was his opportunity.

Of critical importance was the willingness of his French allies to accept his plan. A less-respected figure than Washington would have had difficulty in bringing the disparate elements together – he needed to convince French army and naval officers that he knew what he was doing. In this respect he was fortunate in dealing with two highly professional men in the form of the Comte de Rochambeau and Comte de Grasse.

Washington's plan called for American and French troops to join those already at Yorktown, while a French fleet, commanded by de Grasse, arrived from the West Indies. Each element was vital. The fleet bottled up Cornwallis, preventing either resupply or evacuation, while the increased numbers of the besieging force prevented any sort of breakout by the British. On 17 October, Cornwallis surrendered.

With help from his allies, Washington had finally secured the decisive and large-scale victory that had eluded him for the entire war, vindicating the decision to make him commander in chief. Although it would limp on until 1783, the war was effectively over.

## The presidency

Having steered his army to victory, Washington could have taken any position he wanted, but he desired nothing more than to withdraw in peace to his estate at Mount Vernon. However, the young nation wasn't finished with him just yet.

The fragile bonds that had held the former colonies together during war proved to be weak during peacetime, and there appeared a genuine danger that they could fall apart. Washington saw the need for a constitution to bind the states together more securely.

At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, he offered his thoughts on a peacetime military establishment as well as presiding over the conference itself. His stature was such that he was essential in bringing about ratification of the constitution and two years later he became the first president of the United States of America, winning the vote of every elector. He remains the only US president to be unanimously elected.

As the first man to hold the position, Washington spent most of his first term in office putting together the apparatus to enable the government to perform its duties. As widely expected, he called upon many of the men he had served alongside to work for his administration, including Alexander Hamilton and Henry Knox. He favoured expansion westward, but there were many obstacles to that, including hostile Native American tribes and ongoing British and Spanish influence.

**"GEORGE WASHINGTON WAS A FAR MORE COMPLEX FIGURE THAN THAT PRESENTED IN THE SAINTLY DESCRIPTIONS OF HIS LIFE"**

Perhaps inevitably, as the government took shape, political factions began to form. Washington disliked partisanship and was aware of the discord that factionalism would produce, but he was unable to prevent its spread. Persuaded to serve again, despite desperately wanting to return to a quieter life, Washington's second term in office coincided with the upheaval of the French Revolution. Having lived through and shaped his own revolution, the chaos and bloodshed in France was both shocking and repulsive to him. Washington saw only disaster if America became entangled in the European wars that followed, setting the tone for America's stance on world affairs up until World War I.

In his farewell address, delivered on 19 September 1796, Washington displayed for one final time the modesty that had marked his public life: "Though, in reviewing the incidents of my administration I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend."

Washington was a far more complex figure than that presented in the saintly descriptions of his life common in early historical works, but he was a hugely important man. Flawed as a general, he learned his trade and performed the most important job – that of keeping his army intact – through a mixture of luck in the early years and growing savvy in the later ones. Modest, impartial and uninterested in personal glory or profit, he also made a good choice for the nation's first president.

Having served his country well for more than 20 years, Washington enjoyed a happy but brief retirement at Mount Vernon with his wife, Martha. Succumbing to a fever that took hold after he was caught in a downpour on 12 December 1799, he passed away two days later. He was buried on 18 December at Mount Vernon.

# TIGER I
# SHERMAN FIREFLY VC

**1:72 A50186**

The mighty clash of armour which followed the successful Allied landings on the D-Day beaches of Normandy held the potential to determine the outcome of the war. This time, the dominance of the feared Tiger 1 would be challenged by rocket firing Typhoons from the air and a recently introduced Allied tank on the ground - although appearing outwardly similar to the standard Sherman at first glance, the 17-pounder anti-tank gun mounted on the 'Firefly' was more than capable of knocking out a Tiger. The Germans soon learned to look for the long barrelled Shermans first in any engagement and to make the Firefly a priority target, however, there were so many Shermans in Normandy that misidentification was highly likely and could prove fatal. The days of the mighty Tiger's dominance may have been numbered, but no Allied tank commander would relish the prospect of facing one in combat.

PZKPFW TIGER 1 AUSF E
Commanded by Michael Wittmann, schwere Panzer-Abteilung 101, Normandy, France, 1944.
Length 118mm Width 53mm Pieces 96

SHERMAN FIREFLY VC
Staffordshire Yeomanry, 27th Armoured Brigade, Operation Goodwood, Normandy, France, June 1944.
Length 110mm Width 37mm Pieces 88

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## "YOU MUST FEEL VERY HUMBLE AND AWKWARD IN MY PRESENCE... THEN YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW HUMBLE AND AWKWARD I FEEL IN YOURS"

**Winston Churchill to James Ward**

*A smiling Sergeant James Allen Ward, VC, standing in the cockpit of a No.75 Squadron Wellington bomber*

*Image: Auckland Museum, Public Domain*

# JAMES ALLEN WARD

In July 1941, 13,000ft above the Dutch coastline in a severely damaged Wellington bomber, this New Zealand airman clambered onto his aircraft's wing to put out a fire and save his comrades

WORDS **ALEX BOWERS**

The German night fighter seemed to come from nowhere. One minute, the crew of the No.75 Squadron's Wellington IC, L7818, AA-R had been returning home to RAF Feltwell, Norfolk, after a successful bombing raid on Münster, a mission relatively free from opposition with its end almost in sight. The next, cannon shells smashed through their aircraft, spraying fragments everywhere and filling the cockpit with smoke as a Messerschmitt Bf 110 fired at them from beneath. The damage wrought was swift and severe: the bomber's hydraulic lines were rendered useless, its communication systems knocked out and its undercarriage was in a perilous state. Meanwhile, in the rear turret, Sergeant AJR Box was struck in the foot, though he did manage to fire a few rounds at the attacker, potentially a killing blow that at least ensured they would not see the night fighter again. This mattered little because the Wellington's starboard engine had also been hit and a fuel tank opened, prompting a fire on the wing that, as the flames spread, would surely send the bomber hurtling to the ground in a deadly inferno.

Second pilot James Allen Ward, like his comrades, saw little hope in the situation. A 22-year-old New Zealander, athletic and a proud Kiwi, he watched as Canadian pilot Squadron Leader RP Widdowson turned the aircraft parallel with the Dutch coast. The question was whether they should attempt to crash-land at sea or brave the crossing for Blighty. It appeared unlikely that the plane, in its current condition, could make it much further, so Widdowson commanded Ward to get everyone kitted out in their parachutes. Before Ward left the cockpit to pass on the message, however, he was given one more order by Widdowson: see if he could "put that bloody fire out". A daunting task if ever there was one. Ward first instructed the crew to prepare for the worst and then, with the help of English radio operator Sergeant W Mason and fellow New Zealander and navigator Sergeant LA Lawton, got to work controlling the blaze. The three initially ripped a hole in the khaki-coloured fabric on the side of the fuselage and aimed their extinguishers at the blaze – only for the fierce slipstream outside to blow the liquid away. Desperate, they resorted to flinging coffee from their thermos at the flames, but that too proved futile.

© Getty

Widdowson again steered the aircraft towards England, in little doubt that the Wellington would be forced down well short of safety but deeming a cold night in a dinghy preferable to a German POW camp. He wasn't alone in that sentiment as the crew checked over their parachutes and steadied their nerves for what lay ahead. Except Ward had another idea, having noticed the canvas cockpit cover bundled up in a corner. The young Kiwi picked it up and said to Lawton with a boyish grin: "Think I will hop out with this." He wasn't joking, as hair-brained and foolhardy as his plan sounded to the rest of the crew. Nor was he joking when he argued against taking his parachute because it would only get in the way and increase the drag from the slipstream. But he was ultimately overruled on venturing outside without the only means of surviving should he fall. What's more, a rope, retrieved

***Left:** A Canadian Air Force crew pictured in front of their Wellington bomber, January 1942*

from the dinghy, was tied around him with the other end attached to Lawton. All that was left was for Ward to clamber out of the stricken bomber's astrodome and into the unknown. He was ready.

Ward had grown up in Whanganui, North Island, with a passion for model aircraft, and before the war he'd enjoyed a brief stint as a teacher at the local school. But the young New Zealander now found himself in the peculiar position of scrambling from the upper hatch of a real aircraft travelling at nearly 150kph.

The gale-force winds lashed at him as he leveraged himself onto the wing below. His next challenge was to carefully manoeuvre himself closer to the fire without losing his grip, which he did by kicking holes into the side of the Wellington to keep his boots secure. Still anchored to Lawton, who looked on in dismay, Ward also punched at the framework to create handholds, all the while edging closer to the blaze.

He lay as flat as he could, yet his chest parachute and the bulk of the canvas he was clinging to were hindering his movement. At one time, such was the slipstream's unrelenting force against his body, he was pushed back onto the fuselage. But he had no choice – he had to make another attempt. Inch by inch, battling extreme coldness and fatigue, Ward reached the large flaming gash the German night fighter had inflicted upon the Wellington and began to plug the hole with the canvas. It blew away almost instantly, but Ward managed to grab it and cram it back into the engine fire. It blew away again, lost forever.

Thankfully, at the very least the fire was less severe due to Ward's efforts. Despite being unable to completely extinguish the inferno, he had made enough of a difference to give the crew a sporting chance of making it across the North Sea to Britain. But first he needed to get back to the astrodome. With a fretful Lawton keeping the rope taut and Ward once more utilising his foot and handholds, he returned to the fuselage, hauled himself to the hatch and jimmied his way in. A brief panic overcame him when his right leg got wedged in the opening,

**"THE FLIGHT HOME HAD BEEN MADE POSSIBLE BY THE GALLANTRY OF SERGEANT WARD IN EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE ON THE WING IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY"**

**James Ward's VC citation**

but Lawton freed him as Ward collapsed into the fuselage. The cabin felt almost blissfully quiet compared to the hell he had subjected himself to moments before. Lawton went to the cockpit to update Widdowson, who carried on course for home.

Despite Ward's incredible bravery, they weren't out of danger yet: the crew's next task was to the safely land the stricken aircraft at RAF Newmarket, Suffolk, by manually cranking down the badly damaged landing gear. With the gear deployed, and thanks to their Canadian pilot's exemplary flying skill, the Wellington touched down successfully – albeit after careening down the entire length of the runway and crashing through a barbed-wire perimeter fence. L7818 was written off, never to fly again, but its crew, including its brave Kiwi second pilot, survived.

The awarding of Ward's Victoria Cross was announced on 5 August, 1941. His citation reads: "While flying over the Zuider Zee… [Ward's] aircraft was attacked from beneath by a German Bf 110… The flight home had been made possible by the gallantry of Sergeant Ward in extinguishing the fire on the wing in circumstances of the greatest difficulty and at the risk of his life." According to an anecdotal testimony, Ward was later summoned to 10 Downing Street to meet the prime minister. The encounter proved to be overwhelming for the young New Zealander, as noted by Winston Churchill, who, apparently sensing Ward's discomfort, said to him: "You must feel very humble and awkward in my presence." Ward reportedly agreed, at which point the prime minister continued: "Then you can imagine how humble and awkward I feel in yours." Speaking to the crowd at the event, Ward attributed his success to the work of his ground crew, stating: "There are no VCs for them, but if they didn't do a first-class job for us… we wouldn't get back."

Sadly, it wouldn't be long until Ward didn't return. On 15 September, 1941, having been given command of his own crew and aircraft, James Allen Ward, VC, encountered fierce enemy resistance during an air raid on Hamburg and his plane was severely damaged. Perhaps knowing that no daring endeavours could save him this time, he instead held his fatally damaged Wellington IC, X3205 steady enough for Sergeants LE Peterson and HC Watson to escape. Ward, along with Sergeants HG Sloman, RW Toller and KH Toothill, perished in the flames that engulfed the bomber. They were buried in Ohlsdorf Cemetery, Germany, following official identification.

Ward's VC medal was presented to his family in 1942, somewhat aptly in New Zealand's capital city of Wellington. The award was then loaned to the Royal New Zealand Air Force before going on permanent display at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Other recognitions of his heroism exist, not least several painted depictions of his extraordinary 'wing walk'. A plaque honouring him also stands in Queens Gardens in Dunedin, New Zealand, while the Wellington Faculty of Education renamed one of its halls after Ward. Additionally, in the English village of Feltwell, Norfolk, where the VC recipient's unit was based, the local pub called The Wellington has a mural dedicated to No.75 Squadron. James Allen Ward's legacy is remembered on both sides of the world.

*Crews of No.149 Squadron approach a line of Wellington bombers at Mildenhall, Suffolk, for an early morning training sortie*

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Image: Telso Studios, Auckland Museum

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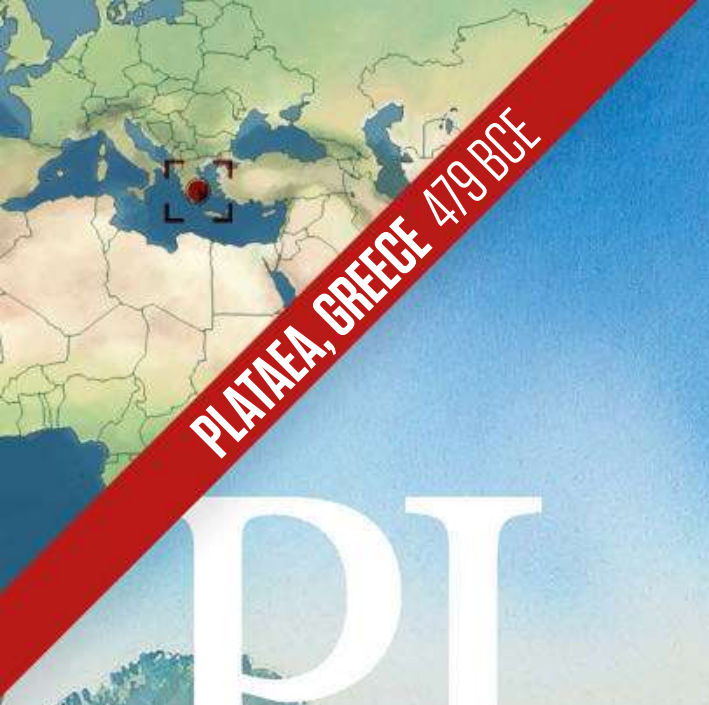
***Above:*** *Airmen and maintenance crew inspect the heavy damage inflicted upon a Wellington bomber during a mission*

***Above, left:*** *James Allen Ward photographed in uniform*

***Left:*** *A German Messerschmitt Bf 110 (or Me 110) in flight. Thousands of Allied bomber airmen lost their lives to these deadly fighters*



PLATAEA, GREECE 479 BCE

# PLATAEA

## 2,500 years ago an alliance of a few Greek city-states defeated the invading army of the mighty Persian empire, saving Greece and securing the future of European civilisation

WORDS **WILLIAM SHEPHERD**

*On the final day of the battle the Persians, led by Mardonius on his charger, held their own against the more heavily armed Spartans. But after their leader had fallen the entire Barbarian army was routed*

## OPPOSING FORCES

| GREEK ALLIES | | PERSIAN ARMY |
|---|---|---|
| COMMANDER: Pausanias | VS | COMMANDER: Mardonius |
| HOPLITES: 40,000 | | ARCHER-SPEARMEN: 80,000 |
| LIGHT INFANTRY: 50,000 | | CAVALRY: 5,000 |
| ARCHERS: 800 | | GREEK HOPLITES: 10,000 |
| | | GREEK LIGHT INFANTRY: 10,000 |

*Image by Peter Dennis from Plataea 479 BC by William Shepherd © 2012 Osprey Publishing*

In the summer of 480 BCE, the Great King of Persia, Xerxes, led an immense army and fleet into Europe with the goal of conquering Greece. Fifteen years earlier the Athenians had played a minor part in the five-year revolt of his Greek subjects spread across the western fringe of his empire, and in 490 BCE they had added injury to insult at Marathon by comprehensively defeating a punitive expedition launched by Darius, Xerxes' father. Darius had planned a second expedition in overwhelming force, but this was delayed by insurrection in Egypt and his death in 485 BCE. It was Xerxes' duty as Darius' successor to execute the plan.

In strategic terms, the conquest of mainland Greece and the islands and northern seaboard of the Aegean would stabilise the empire's western frontier. Then, as 'Great King, King of Kings, Ruler of the Lands', Xerxes or his successors might have turned their thoughts beyond Greece to Sicily and Italy. More would then be at stake even than Greece's future and the golden age of classical civilisation.

Herodotus, our foremost source for these critical years, puts these words into Xerxes' mouth in a speech to his council of leading Persians: "If we conquer the Athenians and their neighbours, we shall extend the territory of Persia to the very edge of the earth, even where it joins with God's heaven. When I have passed through Europe, there will be no lands under the sun that lie outside our borders, because I will make all lands one land." The speech is invented, but it plausibly represents Xerxes' vision and sense of destiny.

Just over 30 of the hundreds of Greek city states resisted the Persian invasion – fortunately this included four of the most powerful: Athens, Sparta, Corinth and Aegina. These cities were appalled at the prospect of falling under tyrannical rule sustained by external power, especially if that power flowed from a towering throne hundreds of kilometres away. This would be a contradiction of their developing concepts of freedom (eleutheria): self-rule with no external constraints, and autonomy (autonomia): a state's exclusive right to make and implement its own laws, determine how to manage its wealth and decide when to go to war. Under Persian rule, any form of government might have been allowed, even emerging democratic systems as at Athens, but tribute would have to be paid and military service could be required at any time. At the level of the state and by individual (male) citizens, this was seen as slavery.

## Victory at sea, Athens burns

In the several decades up to 480 BCE the Persians had very rarely experienced defeat in battle. Having advanced unopposed into central Greece, they quickly brushed aside the first line of defence on land at Thermopylae. However, the Greek fleet had so far held its own against greatly superior numbers in the Straits of Artemisium. The relatively modest casualties at Thermopylae were sustainable but the opening of the land route to Attica made their position untenable. The Persians could now move quickly to cross over to Euboea and attack the Greeks' naval encampment on the island's north shore, and to take control of the beaches

and harbours that the Greeks would need to put into on their way south. Naval defeat would have ended the war, so the Greeks had no option but to withdraw immediately, sailing under cover of darkness.

As planned, Athens and Attica were evacuated. The entire allied fleet, which arrived a few days ahead of the Persians, was accommodated on the island of Salamis. The allied army, excluding the large Athenian contingent, was standing ready to block the land route into the Peloponnese. If the Persians won command of the sea, enabling them to land troops anywhere they pleased behind this defensive line, it would have been useless. This was the argument used by the Athenians, together with the bargaining power of their 200 ships – 60% of the allied fleet – to hold the fractious alliance together and in agreement with their strategy. In 480 BCE it was to bring the Persian fleet to battle in the confined waters of the Straits of Salamis where their numerical advantage could be neutralised. This strategy was famously executed in a brilliant victory and Xerxes and his damaged and demoralised navy set sail for home.

Athens was left smouldering and in ruins, with the Acropolis destroyed ('Mission Accomplished' to that extent). Xerxes' nephew Mardonius stayed behind with a powerful force and the task, which he ambitiously embraced, of completing the conquest of Greece in the following year. The campaigning season was almost over and Mardonius soon took his army north to winter quarters in Thessaly. The Greek allies dispersed to their cities. The Athenians probably had an uncomfortable winter, having repaired what they could, and some may not have bothered to return to their homes. The Persians would be back.

## The second campaign

In early summer Mardonius led his troops south once more and reoccupied Athens and Attica, which had been evacuated a second time. For months he had been offering gold and privileges under imperial rule to Greek cities that would agree terms with the Great King. Athens was the most sought-after prize and Mardonius spared it any further destruction, still hoping the city could be detached from the alliance. Differences over strategy between Athens and Sparta were a fault line which again came close to rupture. But when Mardonius learned that the Spartans had finally agreed to march north with their Peloponnesian allies to join up with the Athenians and confront him, he left Athens in flames again and withdrew into Boeotia.

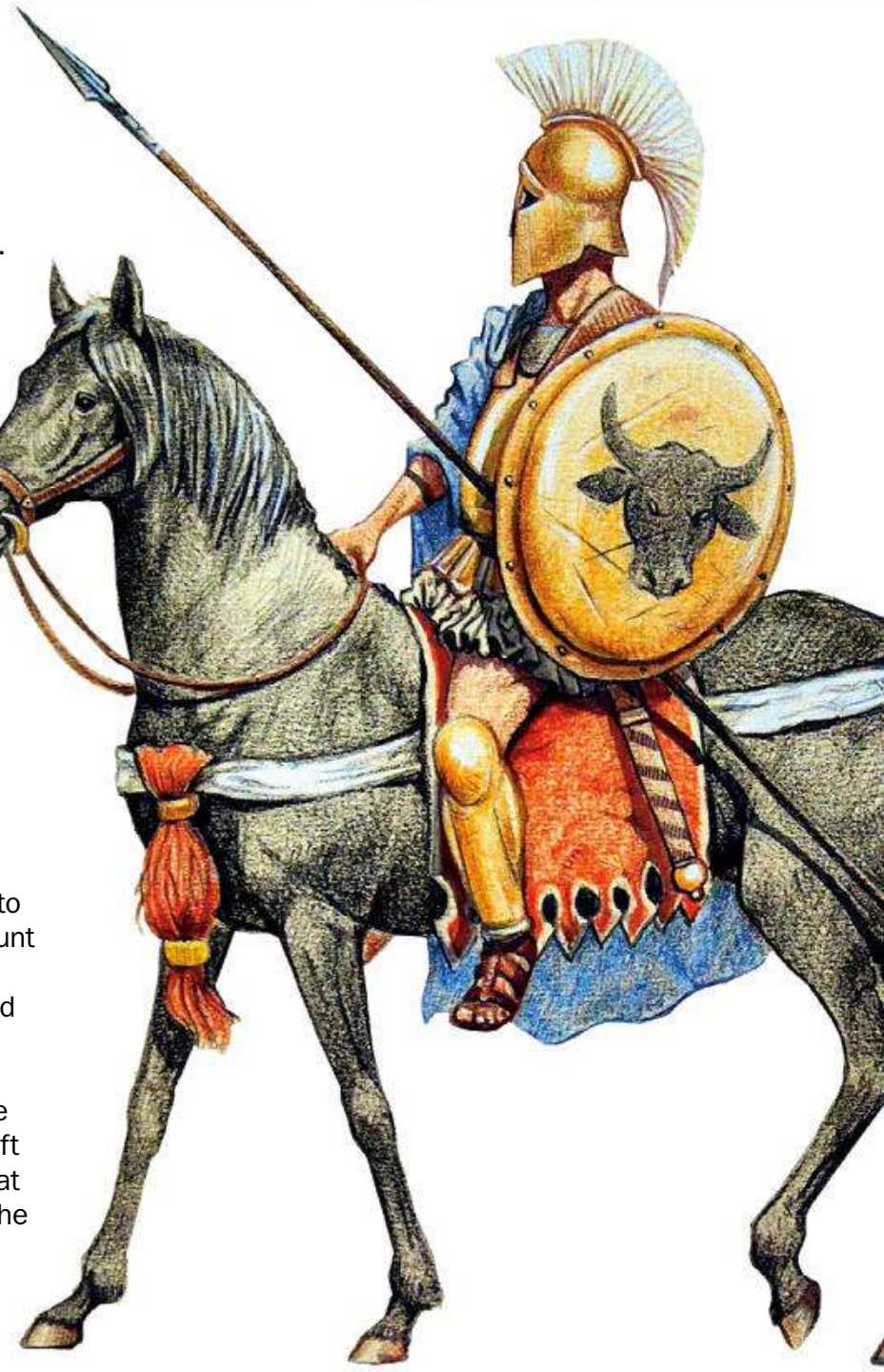
Mardonius could have offered battle on the plain to the west of Athens, which was good country for cavalry. However, the routes over the mountains out of Attica would be dangerous choke points if he had to retreat, and Boeotia gave him other advantages. He would have friendly Thebes at his back, and his supply lines would be shortened and the Greeks' stretched. To save Greece, the Greeks now had to fight and win on a battlefield of Mardonius' choosing. There were to be naval operations, this time in the eastern Aegean; but the opposing fleets were considerably smaller than at Salamis, freeing manpower for the Greeks, especially the Athenians, to deploy on land.

Image by Peter Dennis from Plataea 479 BC by William Shepherd © 2012 Osprey Publishing

***The mixed company of Athenian hoplites and archers break up the Persian cavalry attack which threatened to break the Greek line in the first day of the battle. The archers, some Athenian and some mercenaries, traditionally wore Asian dress***

Having marched his troops into Boeotia, Mardonius positioned them along the north side of the River Asopus on a 6km front straddling the three roads that led to Thebes. The river's banks and muddy bed would make an opposed crossing difficult and the Persians had built a large fortified camp a short distance back from the centre of his line. They had felled all the trees in the surrounding plain to supply the timber they needed for its palisade and gates, and to clear the ground for the mobile tactics they favoured. Herodotus reports a vastly exaggerated figure of 350,000 for Mardonius' army. However, he may well have had more than 100,000, including a substantial cavalry division and several thousand Greek hoplites, and at its core 50-60,000 veteran Persian, Mede and Scythian archer-spearmen.

A few days later the Greeks followed the Persians north and spread out east and west to form a defensive line along the foothills of Mount Cithaeron about 4km south of the enemy line. Rising ground gave some frontal protection and the flanks rested on spurs or river gullies. The Spartans led the march through the pass and then east along the foothills to take their place of honour on the right of the line. The Greek left deployed to the west with the Athenians on that flank. It was as good a defensive position as the



Greeks could hope for. The Spartan Pausanias, their commander-in-chief, was prepared to watch and wait. He was outnumbered but his 40,000 hoplites were more heavily armed, if less agile than Mardonius' Asian troops. In support there was at least the same number of light-armed troops. Overall these were less well-armed and less organised than Mardonius' Asians but included the unique Athenian regiment of several hundred archers.

## DAY 1 Opening action

After some days of inactivity, Mardonius launched a cavalry attack. He had several thousand horse while the Greeks had none apart from a few despatch riders. It was a standard Persian tactic to engage first with their mounted archers and javelin-throwers to soften up the enemy and ideally disrupt their formation. Then the infantry would take over with a heavy archery barrage followed by close-quarters fighting with spear and sword.

The cavalry cantered up to the Greek lines charging in waves, harassing them and shouting insults. The Megarian contingent, 3,000 hoplites strong, was more vulnerable than the rest on an area of flatter ground. The Persians concentrated their efforts, charging and wheeling and showering them with arrows and javelins as they passed across their front. The Megarians, unable to fight back and close to breaking and opening a lethal gap in the battle line, called for urgent assistance. The Athenians, who were positioned close by, sent across an elite detachment of 300 hoplites and their entire regiment of archers, the only archer unit in the Greek army. They ran out and immediately attacked the Persian flank.

The famous commander of the Persian cavalry at Plataea was called Masistius, conspicuously mounted on a beautiful charger with magnificent golden trappings. The horse was hit by an Athenian arrow, reared and threw Masistius, and the Athenians swarmed around him. He was huge and wearing golden scale-armour under his purple tunic. He was not easy to kill, but was finally speared through the eye slit of his helmet. The Persian cavalry at first did not know he had fallen, but then they regrouped and charged in a mass rather than in waves to try and recover their leader's body, calling up the infantry in support. The Athenians were now in danger of being overwhelmed, but support of their own arrived first and the cavalry were finally beaten back. The Greeks were left with an impressive trophy, which they paraded up and down their line on a wagon.

© Alamy

***Left:** There was no cavalry in the Greek army but the Thebans and other Greeks fighting for Persia contributed a few hundred. They did some damage to the disorganised Greek centre on the last day of the battle and provided some cover for the fleeing Persian infantry*

## DAYS 2-8 Stand-off

Next morning, encouraged by their early success, the Greeks decided to advance to the area of low ridges immediately to the south of the Asopus. Mardonius was content to allow them to move onto more open ground, which was where he wanted them, and to stretch and expose their supply line. In any case, he needed to rest his cavalry, customarily the attack spearhead, and give them time to mourn their leader.

Following normal practice before battles, each commander had seers carry out sacrifices and pronounce on the omens. The omens were the same for each side, victory in a defensive battle but defeat for either if they took the initiative and crossed the Asopus to attack. Both commanders were satisfied with this divine guidance, which most likely reinforced their own tactical assessments, and they settled down and waited, taking no further action for a week or eight days. Each was in position on ground on which he believed he could fight most effectively.

The Greeks were well enough placed for static defence in their new position. They were protected on much of their front by rising ground and on the flanks by steeper inclines. But they could not prevent the enemy, especially their cavalry, getting round behind them and it is surprising Mardonius did not exploit this weakness sooner than he did. However, a prolonged stand-off suited him. When and if the time came to fight again, he would have the Greeks in this more exposed position, weakened by days of uncertainty and dwindling supplies, and possibly attacking out of desperation or retreating in disorder. And the rewards for agreeing terms no doubt remained on offer. Overall, with Thebes and subdued central and

northern Greece at his back, his logistics well organised and his best troops veterans of long campaigns far from home, Mardonius was more comfortably placed than Pausanias.

The Spartan commander, on the other hand, was in country that had already been stripped bare by the Persians and there was very little left in the way of resources to draw on in Attica. Greek armies normally carried only a small amount of food with them on campaign and otherwise expected to live off the land, so supplies had to be brought up from the Peloponnese. A further disadvantage was that the challenges of commanding the largest Greek army ever to take the field were completely outside the young Pausanias' or any of his fellow generals' experience.

## DAYS 9-12 Greece on the razor's edge

A week passed, then Mardonius sent cavalry behind the Greek lines to cut them off from their supplies. They intercepted a large supply column emerging from the pass and captured many of the beasts and wagons. Mardonius let two more days pass then made his next move. The Persian cavalry crossed the river on both flanks and attacked in full force. They galloped the length of the line, front and rear and mauled the Greeks with their javelins and arrows. It was impossible for the Greeks to engage with them and all they could do was shelter behind their shields. Inevitably arrows found their mark and the light-armed troops huddled inside the hoplite perimeter were particularly vulnerable.

In the course of this attack the Persians found the spring to the Greeks' rear which was their main source of water. They fouled it and blocked it up, and the Greeks were now cut off from both food and water and being continuously and severely harassed. Also, several days' dense occupation of the same area of land by tens of thousands of men within a tight perimeter must have made the conditions increasingly foul.

The Greek commanders gathered to address these problems. A decision was taken to fall back that night into the foothills of Cithaeron. The new line was to be the same distance from the Asopus as the first day's position but to run from the exit to the main pass where the supplies were now stranded to the rising ground in front of the city of Plataea, which the Persians had burned earlier. This was to be a stronger defensive position with much-needed access to food and ample drinking water

At the agreed time, the Greek centre set off. They had 2-3km to cover heading for the base of Cithaeron but, losing their way in the dark or misunderstanding their orders, they marched a greater distance in the direction of Plataea to the west of their objective and took up position in front of the city. The Greek right and left divisions remained in position on the ridges overlooking the Asopus, about two kilometres apart and out of sight of each other, even in daylight. There is a wonderful story told against the Spartans of one of their regimental commanders, Amompharetus, holding up the planned

01 OVERNIGHT
The Greek centre falls back towards Plataea. The plan is for the whole army to reform on a shorter front, overlapping with their first-day position but running west from the exit to the pass to the eastern side of the ruins of Plataea. The right is (allegedly) held up by Amompharetus' refusal to retreat and the left stays put as requested by Pausanias.
02 DAWN
The Greek right finally moves leaving Amompharetus and his unit behind, but pauses some way short of its intended position. Pausanias requests the Greek left link up with his left.
3
5

***Single combat between a Greek hoplite and an unusually well-armed Persian; his shield, though smaller than the hoplite's, looks equally solid, and his scale armour is a match for that worn by Masistius. The soft headgear is typical, however***

## 07 GREEKS PURSUE

The Greek centre breaks ranks to join in the rout but is intercepted by the Persians' Greek cavalry and sustains casualties.

## 06 PAUSANIAS COUNTERS

Pausanias finally attacks, but by now the Persian centre divisions have crowded in behind Mardonius' left, boxing it in. After fierce hand-to-hand fighting Mardonius falls and the Spartans break the Persian infantry, starting a general rout back across the river to the fort. The Persian cavalry provides the retreat with some cover before heading north to escape to Asia with a few thousand of the best infantry. The Athenians on the Greek left are also victorious, and the Thebans fall back behind their city walls.

## 03 PERSIAN CAVALRY ADVANCES

The Persian cavalry (coming from left and right of the fort), observing the Greek right has abandoned its position, probes forward and attacks it from all sides just as Amompharetus' unit rejoins it.

## 04 GREEK VERSUS GREEK

The Greek troops on the Persian right track the Greek left, cross the river and attack over the flatter ground, Theban and Athenian hoplites colliding.

## 05 SPARTANS ARE HARD PRESSED

The massed archer-spearmen on the Persian left cross the river and advance to form up opposite the Greek right and take over the archery bombardment from the cavalry. The cavalry withdraws. Pausanias waits.

*Map from Plataea 479 BC by William Shepherd*
*© January 2012 Osprey Publishing*

manoeuvre by doggedly refusing to retreat because it would bring shame on Sparta. Suspecting Spartan duplicity, the story goes on, the Athenians also stayed put, sending a horseman over to see what they were doing. Pausanias replied by requesting the Athenians to link up with his division and do whatever he did in the withdrawal.

## The Spartans stand alone

However this situation came about, Pausanias finally gave the order to move at dawn and his entire division apart from Amompharetus' unit headed north. Amompharetus waited until the rest of the division was well on its way then led his men off in formation at a slow pace to rejoin the rest, who had gone about a mile. They had halted there to wait for Amompharetus' unit and just as it reached them, the Persian cavalry came up and attacked the whole division.

The cavalry had pushed forward, seeing empty ground where the Greeks had been drawn up previously. It may have been a coincidence that Amompharetus rejoined the main force at exactly the moment when the cavalry caught up with it, but this would also be consistent with a measured rearguard action to buy time for Pausanias to fall back with the rest of his 11,500 hoplites and form them up into battle order. If his unit comprised approximately 1,000 hoplites with a larger number of light-armed Helots, he could cover quite a broad front in a tight formation and keep the Persians occupied. According to some sources, Amompharetus, who died in the ensuing fighting, was identified as one of the heroes of the battle, which his alleged act of insubordination would not have merited.

Drawn up in close order and, for the sake of argument, eight ranks deep, Pausanias' hoplites with substantial light-armed support would have formed an extremely solid front 2-3,000m in width. The gully formed by a tributary of the Asopus, which cannot now be located, would have covered one of his flanks and similar terrain may have protected the other, but it is likely the cavalry could get around his flanks and behind him. The Athenians had not arrived and Pausanias was for now isolated. However, he was closer to the main pass, an escape route if needed, and to the supplies that were held up there, and his men had fallen back without disruption.

Mardonius led his Persian infantry at the double across the Asopus (again ignoring his seers' warnings that this would bring defeat). If his cavalry and the Greek right were out of sight, he would have known where they were from messages sent back and probably from the dust raised. He may have thought he was pursuing the whole of the Greek army, but it is more likely that he was seizing the opportunity to overwhelm the most significant part of it by concentrating his cavalry and best Asian infantry. He probably knew that the Greek centre had fallen further back and that the left had abandoned their position, though he may not have known exactly where the latter were going. When they saw the Persians charging off in pursuit of the Greeks, the rest of the Barbarian contingents raised their standards and set off after them.

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***Left:*** *The iconic "Corinthian" helmet was gradually superseded in the late 6th and mid 5th centuries by lighter more open-faced types*

**"ON THAT DAY THE MOST GLORIOUS VICTORY WE HAVE EVER KNOWN WAS WON BY PAUSANIAS"**

## Persians attack Greek right flank

When the cavalry caught up with him, Pausanias sent an urgent request to the Athenians to come to his aid immediately, or at least to send their archers. The Athenians were already on the way and making every effort to get over to support him, but the Greeks on the Persian right had tracked their move to the east, crossed the river and attacked them. With over 11,000 hoplites on the Greek side and at least that number from Thebes and other cities opposing them, this was a massive confrontation in its own right. However almost nothing is known about it beyond that it was an Athenian victory, unfortunately eclipsed in history by the larger event playing out a short distance away.

The Persian cavalry harassed Pausanias' formation for an hour or more while Mardonius' infantry covered the 3-4km from their position on the north side of the river. When the infantry arrived, the cavalry withdrew to rest their horses and replenish javelins and arrows, waiting for the moment to attack again when the Greek line broke. The massed Persian infantry now increased the pressure with a continuous and heavier barrage of arrows from behind their palisade of wicker shields. The Greeks endured the arrow bombardment, crouching, kneeling or sitting behind and under their shields, and taking casualties. Their body armour, helmets and shields were generally hardened against the light Asian missiles but they could still find exposed faces, necks, arms or legs. The light-armed troops huddled inside the formation were more vulnerable.

The seers performed their sacrifices, but the omens still would not come out right and the Greeks were struggling. Then Pausanias turned towards the nearby temple of Hera and prayed to the goddess. As he prayed, the 1,500 Tegean allies to his left stood up and went forward. As tradition has it, Pausanias' prayer was answered, the omens became favourable and the Spartans got to their feet and in close order with measured tread bore down upon the Persians. The rest of Mardonius' army crowding in behind his Persians formed an anvil for the Spartan hammer. Persians, standing against hoplites without the protection of a bronze helmet or the standard heavy shield, would have sustained terrible facial and upper-body wounds from Greek spear thrusts, but they fought hard. Herodotus describes the climax of the battle: "The Persians set aside their bows and faced up to the Greeks and at first the fighting was along the shield wall but, when this had been pushed down, there was a bitter hand-to-hand struggle because the Barbarians kept grabbing the Greeks' spears and breaking them. The Persians were not inferior in courage or strength, but they were not armed like hoplites or trained in their way of fighting, and they did not have the tactical skill of their opponents. They were darting forward in ones and tens, gathering together in larger or smaller groups and hurling themselves at the Spartans, and getting cut down. But wherever Mardonius was fighting, mounted on his white charger with his picked band of a thousand, the flower of the Persians, there they pressed the enemy hardest. And while Mardonius lived, the Persians held their own and, fighting back, struck down many Spartans. But Mardonius fell and when the men around him, the best in his army, had been slain, then the rest were put to flight. And on that day the most glorious victory we have ever known was won by Pausanias, son of Cleombrotus son of Anaxandrides." (9.62-64)

The Persian fort was stormed later in the day with many killed or taken prisoner, and Thebes was taken after three weeks siege. A few thousand of Mardonius' original force escaped home to Asia.

Almost exactly 2,500 years ago the tiny minority of Greek city states that took up arms against the mightiest empire yet seen in the ancient world had halted its western expansion and driven it back. If they had failed, there would have been no golden flowering of Athenian culture and institutions in the decades that followed. If Greece had become part of a Persian Empire with Italy now on its frontier, Rome might not have been allowed to grow into a western world power. Without the bloodstream of the Roman Empire's communications network to sustain it, Christianity might never have grown to become a world religion. A Persian victory could have profoundly redirected the evolution of the cultural, intellectual, political and religious landscapes of Europe and the Middle East.

***Special thanks to Osprey Publishing for helping with the production of this feature.***

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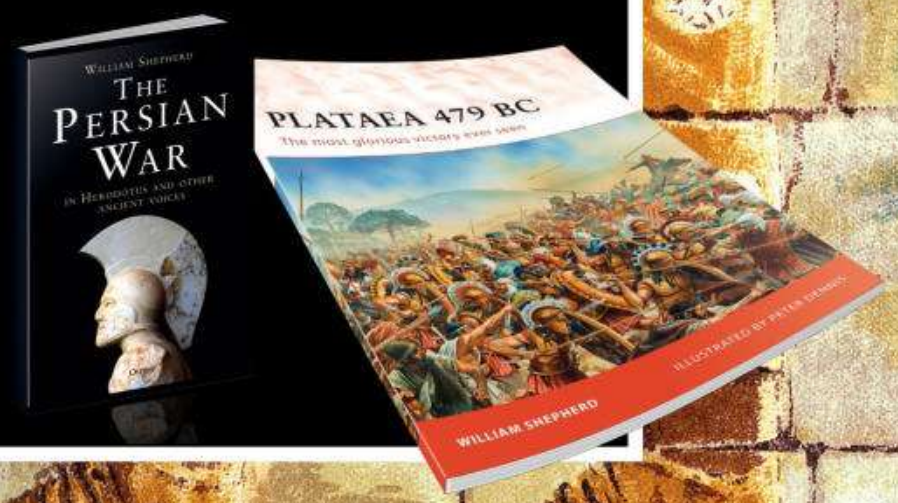
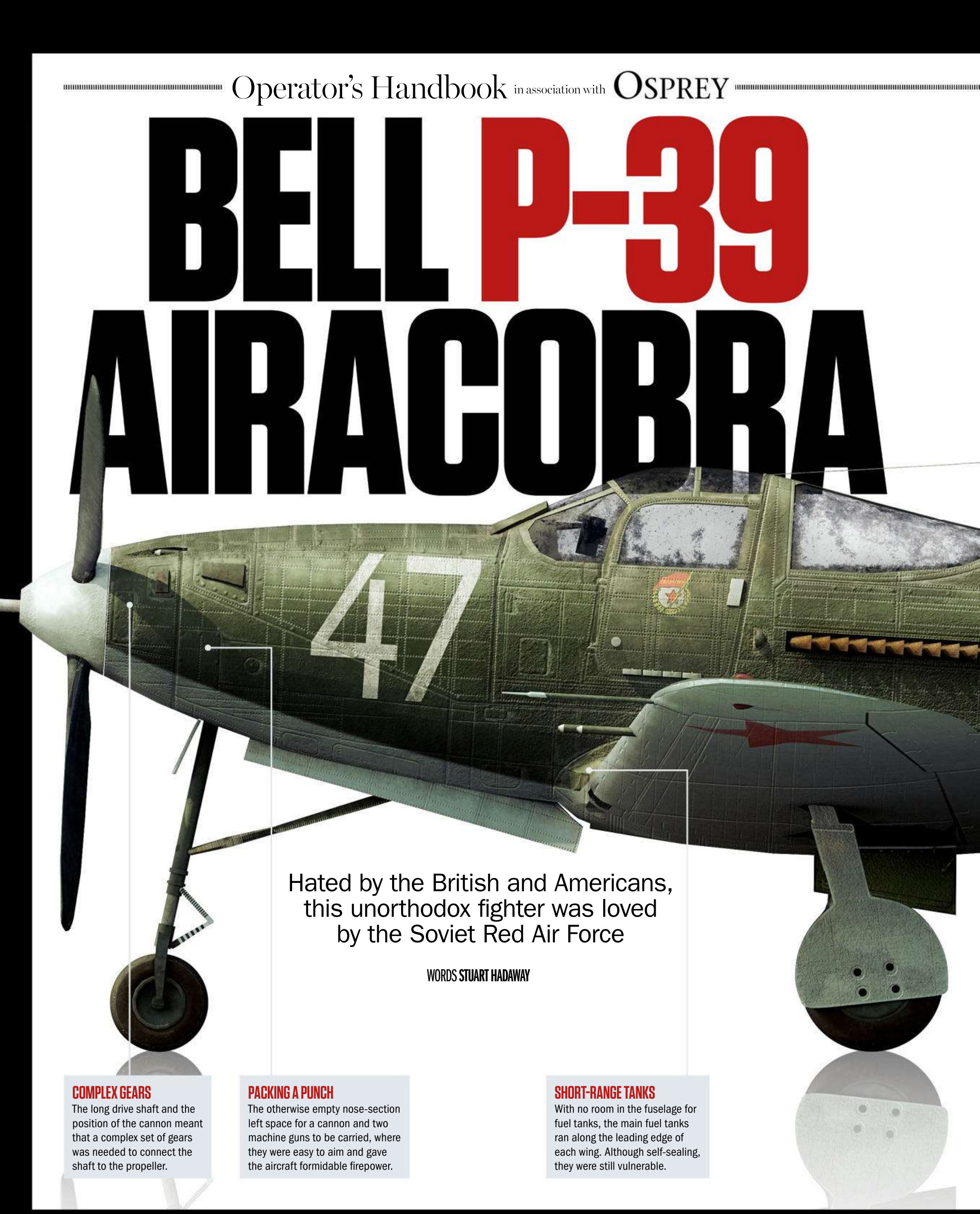
William Shepherd has written three books on the Persian War. The most recent, *The Persian War in Herodotus and Other Ancient Voices* (Osprey 2019), interweaves comprehensive extracts from all the main sources with linking narrative and interpretation. His publications also include *Salamis 480 BC* and *Plataea 479 BC* in Osprey's Campaign series.




*The frieze of the archers (detail), from the palace of Darius I, king of Persia, in Susa (6th century BC)*

# BELL P-39 AIRACOBRA




Hated by the British and Americans, this unorthodox fighter was loved by the Soviet Red Air Force

WORDS **STUART HADAWAY**

### COMPLEX GEARS

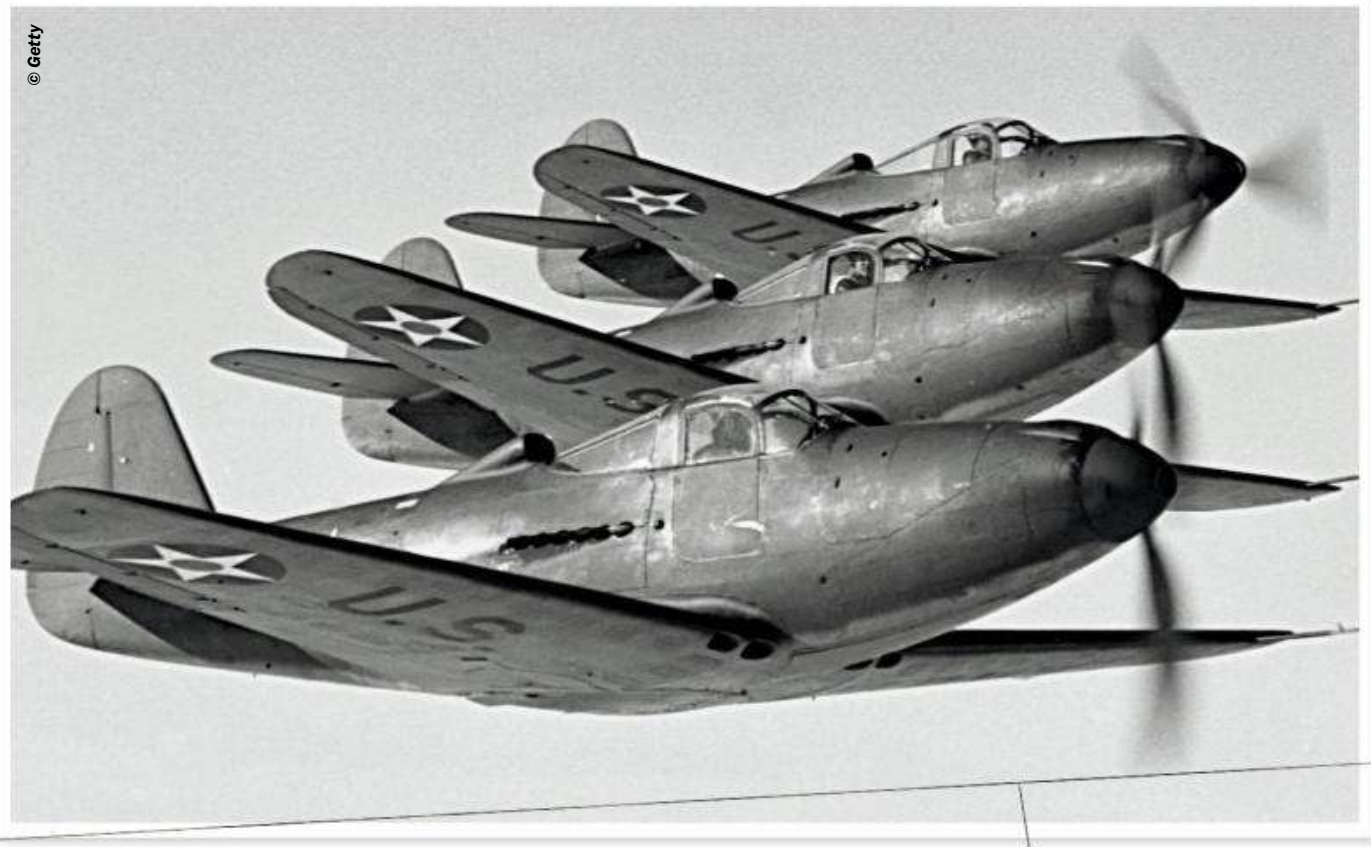
The long drive shaft and the position of the cannon meant that a complex set of gears was needed to connect the shaft to the propeller.

### PACKING A PUNCH

The otherwise empty nose-section left space for a cannon and two machine guns to be carried, where they were easy to aim and gave the aircraft formidable firepower.

### SHORT-RANGE TANKS

With no room in the fuselage for fuel tanks, the main fuel tanks ran along the leading edge of each wing. Although self-sealing, they were still vulnerable.



© Getty

# BELL P-39 AIRACOBRA

| | |
|---|---|
| COMMISSIONED: | 1939 |
| ORIGIN: | UNITED STATES |
| LENGTH: | 9.2M (30FT 2IN) |
| WINGSPAN: | 10.3M (34FT) |
| ENGINE: | 857KW (1150HP) ALLISON V-1710 |
| CREW: | 1 |
| PRIMARY WEAPON: | 1 X 37MM CANNON, 2 X 12.7MM AND 4 X 7.62MM MACHINE GUNS |
| SECONDARY WEAPON: | 1 X 227KG (500LB) BOMB |

***Left:** A formation of USAAF Bell Airacobras*

Illustration: Nicholas Forder

## CENTRE-MOUNTED ENGINE

The defining characteristic of the Airacobra was the engine position: it was mounted behind the pilot in the central fuselage.

***Below:** A USAAF Airacobra in California, 1943*

© Alamy

The Bell P-39 Airacobra began life as a private venture in 1939, for potential sale to the United States Army Air Force (USAAF). Its unorthodox design, with the engine behind the pilot, meant a huge amount of armament could be packed into the nose and also allowed for a well-armoured fuselage. Unfortunately, this added a lot of weight to the airframe, and the engine failed to deliver sufficient power.

At the time, the Western world was desperate for fighters, and the type was bought by several air forces. France fell before theirs could be delivered, and the RAF rapidly disposed of their Airacobras. The USAAF used the type for longer, especially in the Pacific, where it was a useful stopgap over New Guinea and the South West Pacific until higher-performance types entered service. It was the Soviets who were most impressed with the Airacobra. Its rugged construction and tricycle undercarriage was ideal for use on rough airfields, while the lack of high-altitude performance was not a problem for the Soviets because their main operational area was low over the battlefield, where the Airacobra proved a formidable fighter and ground-attack aircraft.

# ARMAMENT

The space in the nose section allowed for an awesome concentration of firepower to be carried. A 37mm cannon, with 15 rounds, was positioned to fire through the propeller hub. In RAF service, this was replaced by a 20mm cannon, which allowed for a larger magazine of 30 rounds to be carried. Two 12.7mm machine guns were positioned on the upper cowling, while two further 7.62mm machine guns were carried in each wing. The 12.7mm and 7.62mm machine guns were replaced by 7.7mm machine guns in RAF service.

*An Airacobra of the 72nd Tactical Recon Group loaded with a single bomb under the centre section*

***Left:** A 37mm cannon shell recovered from an Airacobra wreck in Russia*

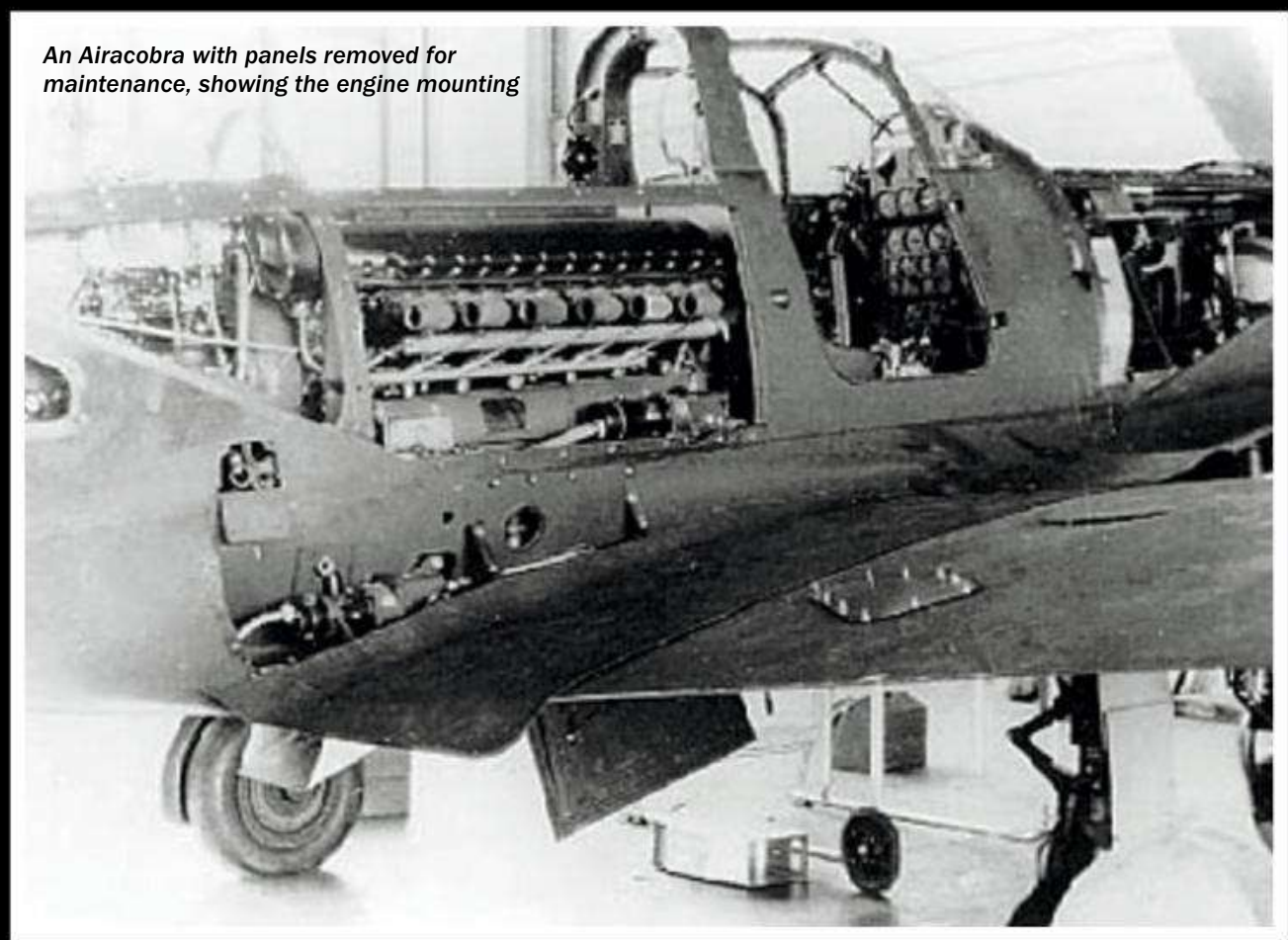
***Below:** RAF armourers fill the magazines of the three guns in the nose of an Airacobra*

## DESIGN

The Airacobra was an all-metal low-wing monoplane that was unusual in several ways. The primary distinction was the engine, which sat behind the cockpit over the centre section, with the oil tank and radio equipment behind it. This, along with heavy armour in the nose, meant the weight and balance of the aircraft required tricycle undercarriage, which added more weight but made it easier to control on the ground. The pilot sat quite high up in a cab-style cockpit, and the nose was packed with weaponry.

## "THE SPACE IN THE NOSE SECTION ALLOWED AN AWESOME CONCENTRATION OF FIREPOWER TO BE CARRIED"

***Below:** The engine placement on the Airacobra gives it strange lines, with a streamlined nose and bulbous centre section*



*An Airacobra with panels removed for maintenance, showing the engine mounting*

## ENGINE

The P-39 had a single 857kW (1,150hp) Allison V-1710 liquid-cooled inline engine. It had a single-speed supercharger, which gave the aircraft good low and medium altitude performance. However, the turbo-charger fitted in the prototype, which would have improved high-altitude performance, was not installed in the production models. The engine sat in the fuselage behind the pilot, with the supercharger air intake above and behind the cockpit. The drive shaft was connected to the propeller via a lengthy and complicated series of gears in the nose.

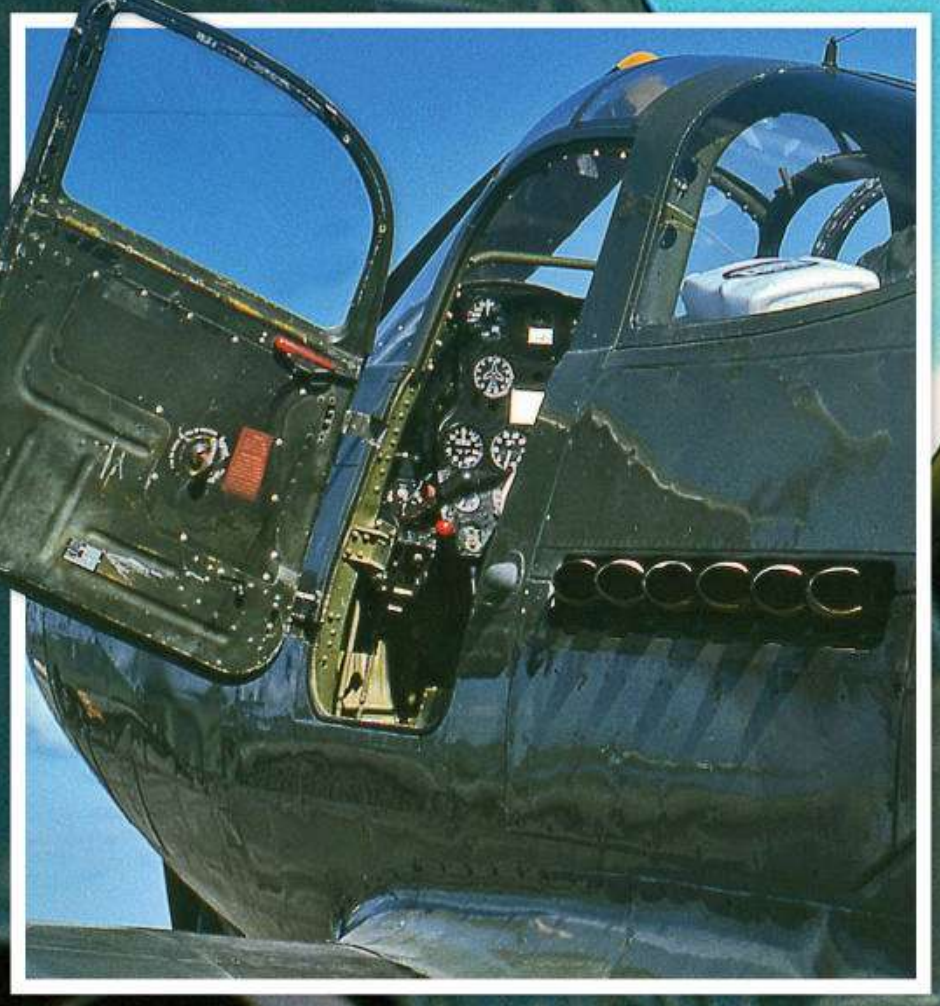
*The position of the engine led to unorthodox placement for the supercharger air intake and the exhausts*

*All images © Alamy*

# COCKPIT

The Airacobra's cockpit was fully enclosed, with car-style doors on either side. Entering and exiting was the same as in a car, by swinging open a door, which made bailing out difficult. The drive shaft for the engine ran through the floor between the pilot's feet – this was noisy and caused vibrations that affected both the pilot and the instruments. The pilot had good forward and downward views, and his control column had a trigger for his machine guns and a button on top to fire the cannon.

*The unusual cabin-style cockpit of the Airacobra, with car-style doors*



*Getting out of the Airacobra in a hurry could be problematic*

*USAAF Airacobra on New Guinea*

"THE RAF'S ORDER WAS DIVERTED TO RUSSIA, WHERE NEARLY 5,000 OF THE TYPE WERE USED VERY SUCCESSFULLY"

## SERVICE HISTORY

After being unveiled in early 1939, the P-39 first flew in September 1940, by which time orders had already been placed by Britain, France and the US. The RAF absorbed the French order, and the first Airacobras were delivered to the UK in July 1941. The type went operational in October 1941 but was withdrawn from service after less than a week when it proved underpowered and to have numerous instrument problems. However, visiting Soviet pilots liked the aircraft. The RAF's order was diverted to Russia, where nearly 5,000 of the type were used very successfully in air-to-air and air-to-ground combat.

The USAAF used the type over the South West Pacific, including New Guinea, through 1942-3, and in Europe as late as 1944, but the P-39's short range and poor high-altitude performance made it unsuitable for use in the later Pacific campaigns.

*Bell Airacobra in Soviet service*

All images © Alamy


DUEL 87

**P-39/P-400 AIRACOBRA VS A6M2/3 ZERO-SEN: NEW GUINEA 1942**

BY MICHAEL JOHN CLARINGBOULD

It was over remote New Guinea where the advance of the Imperial Japanese Naval Air Force A6M Zero-sen fighter was first halted in a series of aerial battles with USAAF P-39 Airacobras. With detailed maps and contemporary photographs, this fully illustrated study describes how American Airacobra pilots battled against both their veteran foes in Zero-sens and often deadly weather in the tropics just months after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

AIRCRAFT OF THE ACES 74

**SOVIET LEND-LEASE FIGHTER ACES OF WORLD WAR 2**

BY GEORGE MELLINGER

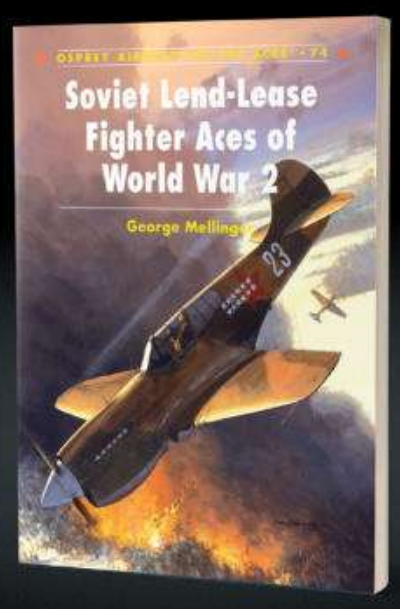
By the end of 1941 the Soviet Union was near collapsed and its air force almost annihilated. After the United States entered the war, the Lend-lease agreement it had with Britain was extended to the USSR, and amongst the almost 10,000 fighters supplied to the Red Air Force were thousands of P-39 Airacobras. As this volume reveals, the aircraft was flown by a number of leading Soviet aces.

AIRCRAFT OF THE ACES 36

**P-39 AIRACOBRA ACES OF WORLD WAR 2**

BY JOHN STANAWAY & GEORGE MELLINGER

The P-39 Airacobra was the first mid-engined American fighter to see frontline service. Fitted with a tricycle undercarriage, the P-39 served alongside the P-38 Lightning and P-40 Warhawk in the bitter struggle to capture Guadalcanal in 1942–43, as well as seeing action over the jungles of New Guinea. This book recounts the exploits of the elite USAAF pilots who achieved ace status while flying the much-maligned Bell fighter.



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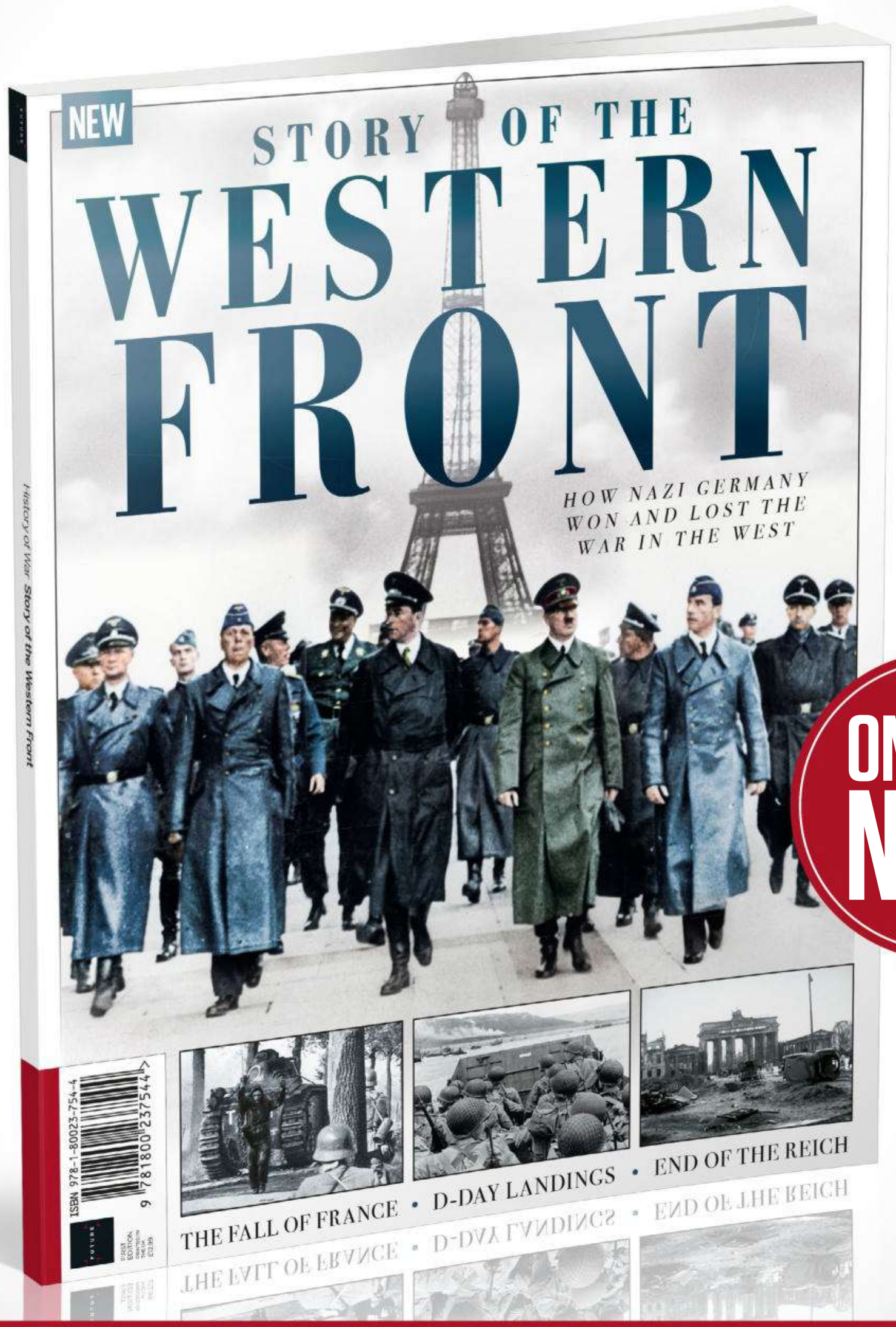
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# HOME FRONT

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# MUSEUMS & EVENTS

## Discover the Imperial War Museum's new all-day festival, renovations happening to the Scapa Flow Museum, and Chatham Historic Dockyard's exhibition about the wreck of HMS Invincible

*This event is to be held at IWM Duxford, home to Europe's largest air museum*

***Above:** Members of the public will be able to learn more about iconic aircraft, including the Lancaster, Vulcan, Spitfire and Mosquito*

***Above, centre:** Katja Hoyer, author of* Blood and Iron*, is due to attend the festival with other historians such as Damien Lewis and Dr Helen Fry*

***Above, far left:** One of the talks will highlight the lives of Black Americans in Britain during the Second World War*

# Imperial War Museum launches new event

### Veterans, authors, curators and some of the museum's famous collection will converge on IWM Duxford for a new summer 2022 history festival

A new all-day event hosted by the Imperial War Museum is to take place at IWM Duxford on Saturday, 11 June, 2022. Known as IWM Live, it will combine the institute's renowned collection, the expertise of its curators, book signings from leading historical authors and the opportunity for visitors to engage with veterans of conflict.

Emily Charles, curator of the American Air Museum at IWM Duxford and speaker for the upcoming programme, says: "We are so excited to showcase everything special about experiencing IWM live and in person with this event."

Talks will cover a multitude of topics, from iconic aircraft such as the Lancaster, Vulcan, Spitfire and Mosquito, to naval operations focussing on HMS Belfast and the Arctic Convoys. There will also be lectures about the experiences of Black Americans in Britain during the Second World War, how the Imperial War Museum was founded in the First World War, and the Indian Army throughout both conflicts – among many other discussions. Those interested to learn more about IWM London's recently opened WWII and Holocaust Galleries, meanwhile, will be offered the chance to hear about what went into their design.

Additionally, attendees can expect presentations and demonstrations of many of the most compelling items in the IWM collection, some of which will be made available to the public for handling for the first time. The rest of IWM Duxford, considered Europe's largest air museum, can likewise be explored, with tours running for much of the day.

Expert authors lending their voices to IWM Live will include Professor Richard Overy (*The Dictators*; *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War 1931-1945*), Clare Mulley (*The Women Who Flew For Hitler*), Dr Helen Fry (*Spymaster*; *The Walls Have Ears*), Damien Lewis (*Churchill's Secret Warriors*; *Hunting The Nazi Bomb*; *SAS Bravo Three Zero*) and Katja Hoyer (*Blood and Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German Empire*).

Speaking about the significance of where the history festival will be hosted, Katja Hoyer says: "There couldn't be a more apt place to meet existing and future readers. The historical significance of Duxford makes it a fascinating venue to visit. I'm delighted to be part of this exciting programme at IWM Live and share the stage with not just my fellow historians but with some of the museum's fantastic collections."

Tickets for IWM Live can be booked online now for £45 per person.

**For more information visit: www.iwm.org.uk**

# Renovations to the Scapa Flow Museum

**The Scapa Flow Museum will reopen in the summer after a significant restoration project to ensure it continues telling Orkney's unique war history**

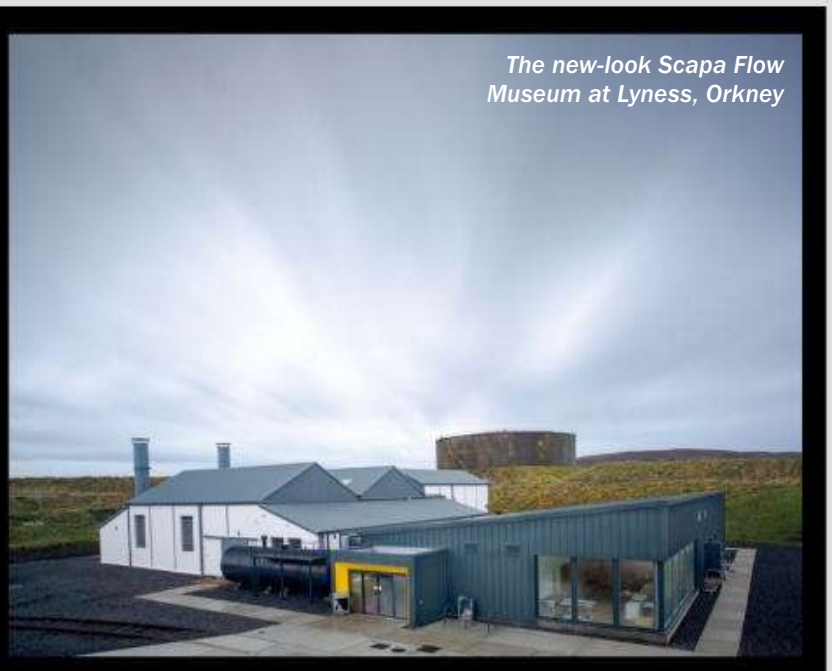
Once a Royal Navy pumphouse built in 1937, the Scapa Flow Museum, located on Scotland's island of Hoy in Orkney, has displayed artefacts and exhibitions since its founding in 1990. Now, following its closure for extensive renovations worth £4.4 million and carried out over the last three years, it's due to reopen with new and improved features.

The refurbishment, funded by multiple organisations, includes the installation of a modern wing intended to complement the existing structure. Upon completion, the museum will host improved visitor space and upgraded facilities such as a café, foyer, toilets, and a gift shop at its site of the former Royal Navy base of Lyness.

The restoration project will also extend to the two First World War-era naval guns located outside, which used to be aboard the SMS Bremse and SMS Karlsruhe as part of the German High Seas Fleet that was eventually scuttled in Scapa Flow.

Other historic wartime events associated with Orkney, from the island's role in the 1916 Battle of Jutland to the sinking of HMS Royal Oak and HMS Vanguard during the Second World War, will be further highlighted within the museum after its conservation. Speaking to *History of War*, Councillor Gwenda Shearer says: "The improvements… and associated conservation works have been long awaited by our museum's team and by the local community - and by enthusiasts of wartime history around the world. We can't wait to bring that story to life for many, many more people when the museum reopens in summer 2022."

For more information: www.orkney.gov.uk/scapaflow



*The new-look Scapa Flow Museum at Lyness, Orkney*

*The plinth-displayed naval guns of SMS Bremse (pictured) and SMS Karlsruhe have been temporarily dismantled for conservation efforts*

# HMS Invincible exhibition at Chatham Dockyard

**The Chatham Historic Dockyard is set to host a fascinating maritime archaeological exhibition about the wreck of HMS Invincible, the British warship that lay undiscovered on the seabed for nearly three centuries**

Located beneath the waves of the Solent, HMS Invincible – the first vessel of the Royal Navy to receive the name – has remained largely undisturbed for almost 300 years. However, her centuries-old secrets have since surfaced at an exhibition currently held at the Chatham Historic Dockyard. The display, known as Diving Deep: HMS Invincible 1744 and on loan from the National Museum of the Royal Navy, charters the story of the ship, starting with its construction by the French to its capture by the British, and through to its sinking off the coast of the Isle of Wight before being rediscovered by a fisherman in 1979.

Nick Ball – Collections, Galleries and Interpretation Manager at Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust – says: "Visitors… will be able to learn why the Invincible was so special… She was a game-changer who even influenced the subsequent design of the world's most famous warship – Admiral Nelson's HMS Victory, built here at Chatham."

Having been opened in Kent on 12 February, 2022, Diving Deep enables members of the public to explore the seabed virtually. It likewise offers the chance to examine fascinating artefacts retrieved from the wreck itself. Many of these items, including sailors' shoes and rope still smelling of the tar painted on it in 1758, were brought up from the ocean floor following recent emergency underwater excavation. Entry to the exhibition, which will run until 20 November, 2022, is part of the Dockyard's general ticket.

© Michael Pitts - Chatham Historic Dockyard

© National Museum of the Royal Navy

***Left:** HMS Invincible was en route to Nova Scotia, present-day Canada, in 1758 when she ran aground on a sandbank in the Solent*

***Above:** After a year at its initial site in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard (pictured), the exhibition has moved to Chatham, Kent*

For more information: thedockyard.co.uk

WWII THIS MONTH...

# FEBRUARY 1942

To commemorate 80 years since the Second World War, **History of War** will be taking a look at some of the key events taking place during each month of the conflict

## CITIZENS NO MORE

**On 19 February, all American citizens of Japanese heritage were ordered to report to assembly areas in order to be moved to internment camps, dubbed Relocation Centers. The measure, called Executive Order 9066, was signed by President Roosevelt in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, purportedly to prevent espionage among Japanese-American citizens. The camps were closed in 1945, though Executive Order 9066 was only repealed decades later, and some 80,000 citizens were granted reparations.**

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

# THE GERMAN ‘CHANNEL DASH’

**On 11 February, a number of German battleships and heavy cruisers attempted to speed past the Royal Navy in the English Channel and return to their home ports in Germany. Dubbed Operation Cerberus by the Kriegsmarine, the mission included the Scharnhorst and the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen. Sailing from Brest, Brittany, the naval group succeeded in evading the British, who failed to identify and engage the Germans.**

© Getty

# BATTLE FOR SINGAPORE

**The Japanese assault on Singapore began on 7 February. Though the island city was considered a fortress that was impregnable to attack from the sea, the Japanese attack through the dense jungle terrain to the north of the city took British command completely by surprise. “The possibility of Singapore having no landward defences no more entered into my mind than that of a battleship being launched without a bottom,” Winston Churchill later remarked. The Allied forces in Singapore surrendered on 15 February.**

© Getty

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# DEATH OF AN ENGINEER

**On 8 February Fritz Todt, the high-ranking Nazi engineer and Reich Minister for Armaments and Ammunition, was killed when his plane crashed shortly after takeoff from Hitler’s Wolf’s Lair HQ. Todt was responsible for creating Organisation Todt (OT), officially the “building construction branch of the Wehrmacht”, that before the war built many of Nazi Germany’s major engineering projects, including bridges, viaducts and the Autobahn. During the war, OT was responsible for constructing numerous military structures, such as the fortifications of the Atlantic Wall, submarine pens, bunkers and V2 rocket factories and launchpads. OT used mass slave labour to achieve its large military projects, largely civilians of occupied nations.**

# REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books

# HOSTILE PARTICIPANTS

## A BRUTAL, ALL-BUT-FORGOTTEN WAR IN THE PHILIPPINES OVER A CENTURY AGO IS VIVIDLY BROUGHT TO LIFE IN A DEBUT NOVEL THAT'S FULL OF TWISTS AND TURNS

**Author:** Miguel Miranda **Publisher:** Lime Tree Press
**Price:** £7.25 (paperback) **On sale:** Out now

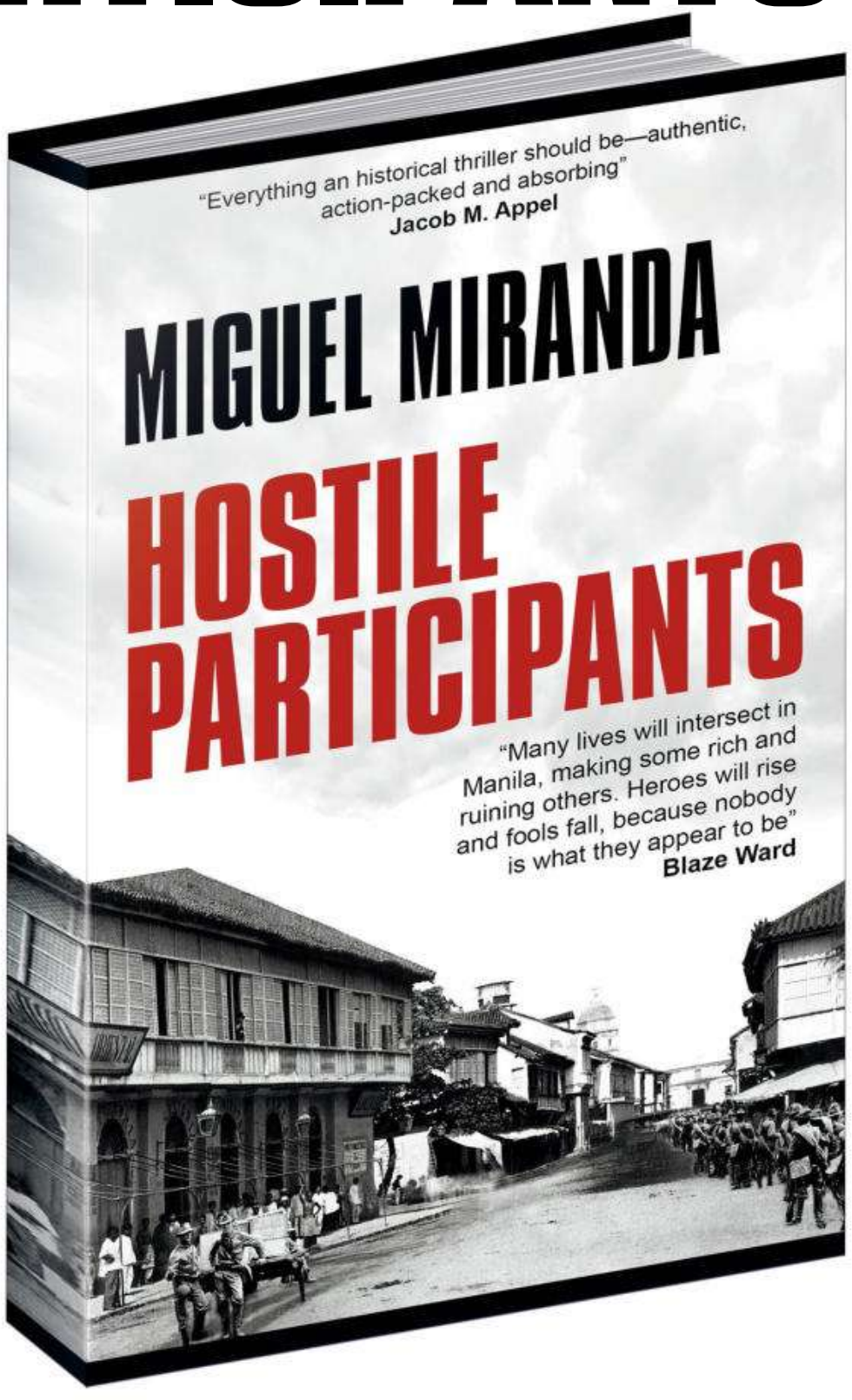
War is a grimy, fetid business, whether on a grand scale or the microcosm of two individuals locked in mortal combat, one to survive and the other to perish with the thrust of a knife or the sharp report of a pistol.

In his debut novel, *Hostile Participants*, Miguel Miranda captures the essence of war, its grittiness, its death and desolation that turn men into something distinctly different from the pedestrian existence that most experience. Miranda pulls no punches in the vivid descriptions of stark conflict conjured up in his mind's eye, conflict that spills from shadowy city streets into deep, dark jungle.

The backdrop for Miranda's tale of intrigue and close-quarter combat is the city of Manila and the island of Luzon in the Philippines, and the time is the turn of the 20th century when a fledgling Filipino government attempted to remain independent rather than subservient to the territorial rule of the United States. The war, largely forgotten or even virtually unknown to Americans today, has been called the Philippine Insurrection of 1899 – 1902, and more recently the Philippine-American War. The fighting was often brutal, at times hand-to-hand, and both sides paid a price in blood. Overmatched and ill-equipped, the Filipinos and their leader, Emilio Aguinaldo, were ruthlessly suppressed.

Miranda presents a gripping story, one with a depth of character development that is seldom experienced in historical fiction. He offers a glimpse behind the diverse veneers of individuals, from the adventurer to the ne'er do well, an otherwise innocuous shopkeeper, and a blustering officer sending soldiers to their mixed bag of fates.

The subtleties and the complexities of the plot make *Hostile Participants* a rare rollercoaster of a read, its twists and turns spinning a compelling tale set amid a land and culture that are – at the same time – somewhat remote but all too familiar in the human experience. *Hostile Participants* is an admirable first foray for Miranda. He does not disappoint. **MH**


"Everything an historical thriller should be—authentic, action-packed and absorbing"
Jacob M. Appel
MIGUEL MIRANDA
HOSTILE PARTICIPANTS
"Many lives will intersect in Manila, making some rich and ruining others. Heroes will rise and fools fall, because nobody is what they appear to be"
Blaze Ward

**"MIRANDA PRESENTS A GRIPPING STORY, ONE WITH A DEPTH OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT THAT IS SELDOM EXPERIENCED IN HISTORICAL FICTION"**

***Left:** The Philippine Insurrection (1899 – 1902) saw poorly armed Filipinos rise up against colonial rule in a bloody conflict that cost many lives on both sides*

# U.S. CIVIL WAR BATTLE BY BATTLE

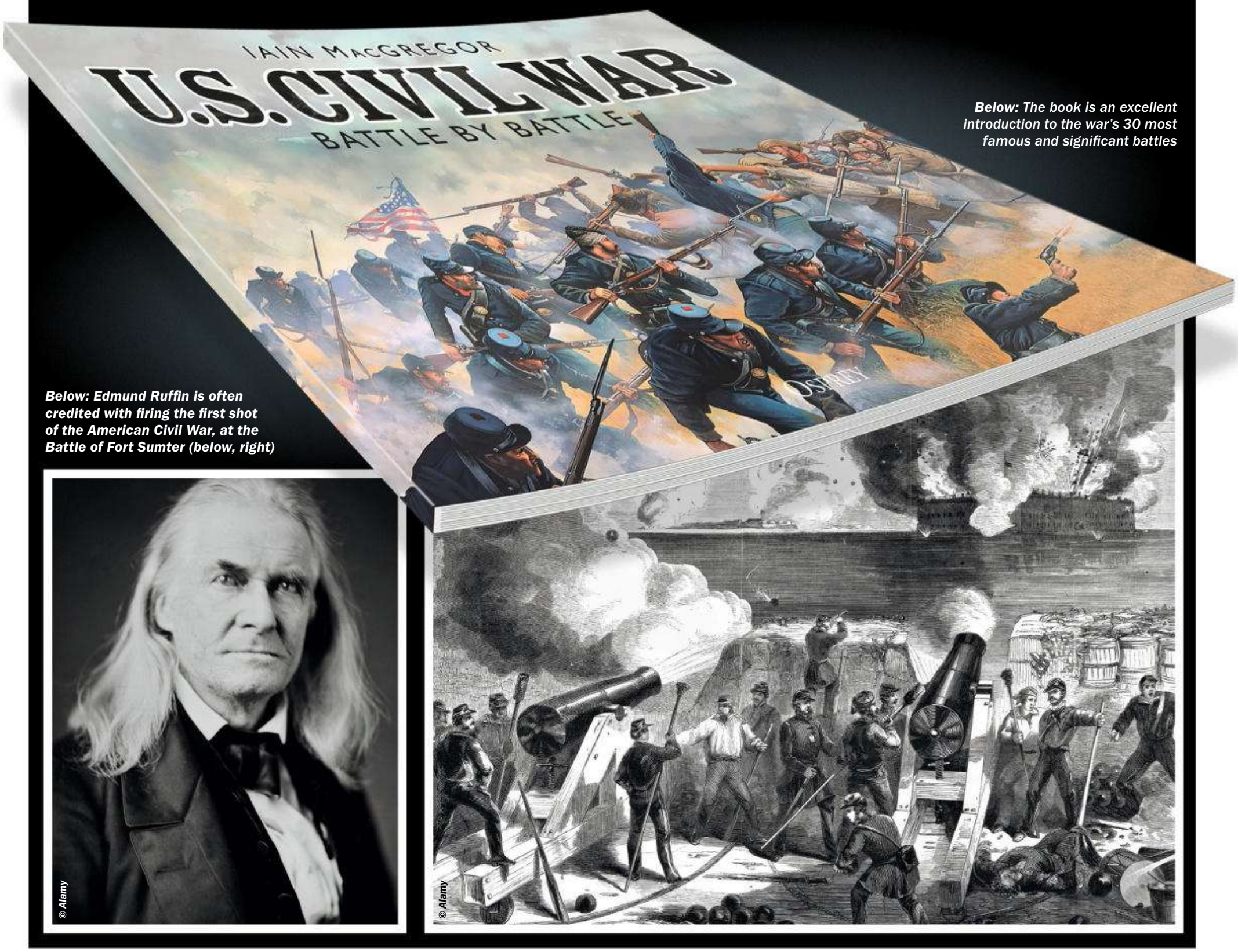
## THIS ACCOUNT OF THE CONFLICT'S SIGNIFICANT ENGAGEMENTS IS ACCOMPANIED BY BEAUTIFUL ARTWORK

**Author:** Iain MacGregor **Publisher:** Osprey Publishing **Price:** £7.99 **Released:** 3 March

The American Civil War remains one of the bloodiest conflicts in US history. Between 1861 and 1865, 620,000 American soldiers and sailors are estimated to have lost their lives (more recent studies put the figure at around 750,000.) The number of major battles, smaller actions and minor skirmishes stands at 8,000, fought across much of North America and on the seas and waterways. Since the war ended there has been incredible interest in the subject, with many thousands of books published.

At the start of *U.S. Civil War: Battle by Battle* is a useful chronology of the conflict giving dates of the key battles and campaigns, ranging from the Battle of Fort Sumter in April 1861 to the Battle of Palmito Ranch in May 1865. This is followed by 30 short chapters, each outlining a specific battle of the American Civil War in chronological order – these include both well-known as well as some lesser-known clashes. Each chapter is also illustrated with beautiful artwork depicting the engagement. In addition to this, other illustrations are included within the text, the captions for which offer snippets of useful extra information, ranging from battle flags and small arms to cannon and warships.

This book is a short but interesting read that is engagingly written and well-researched. Although it only scratches the surface of the conflict it still manages to give the reader a good introduction to its military history and should appeal to both the general reader and American Civil War enthusiast alike. **MS**




***Below:** The book is an excellent introduction to the war's 30 most famous and significant battles*

***Below: Edmund Ruffin is often credited with firing the first shot of the American Civil War, at the Battle of Fort Sumter (below, right)***



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ALL ABOUT HISTORY RECOMMENDS

# PERSIANS

# THE AGE OF THE GREAT KINGS

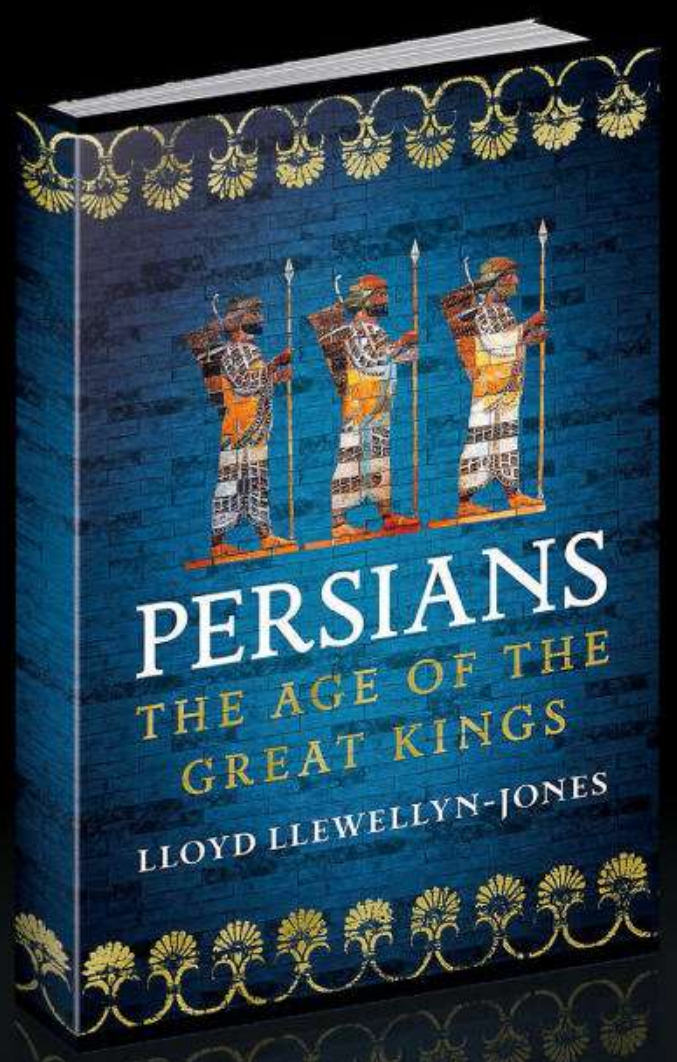
## EXPLORE THE HISTORY OF THIS EXTRAORDINARY ANCIENT EMPIRE

**Author:** Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones **Publisher:** Wildfire **Price:** £25 **Released:** April 2022

Meticulously researched, *Persians: The Age of the Great Kings* tells the extraordinary story of this superpower of the ancient world. In a narrative that stretches back thousands of years and across vast stretches of land, Professor Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones presents a skilful and engaging history of the Achaemenid dynasty.

In particular, this history of the Great Kings seeks to rebalance and reexamine the sources from which it is drawn. It moves away from the writings of the Ancient Greeks, such as Herodotus, and raises questions about how those writings might be best read, understood and placed into context. Llewellyn-Jones endeavours to place Persian sources – from administrative memos to art and archeological findings – at the centre of the story. Indeed, the urgent notes of bureaucrats from long ago echo with a particular vibrancy.

From the rules of etiquette when dining and hunting, to the structure and significance of the harem, this is a story of regal splendour, courtly intrigue and struggles for power. It is also a history of expansion, rebellion and oppression. The story of the Great Kings is placed alongside those who suffered, were exploited, forcibly relocated and enslaved, and it highlights how labouring men, women and children were allotted scarcely enough food to survive. It also tells us that Babylonia was required to provide 500 castrated boys as a tribute to the king each year. At times it makes for challenging and affecting reading.

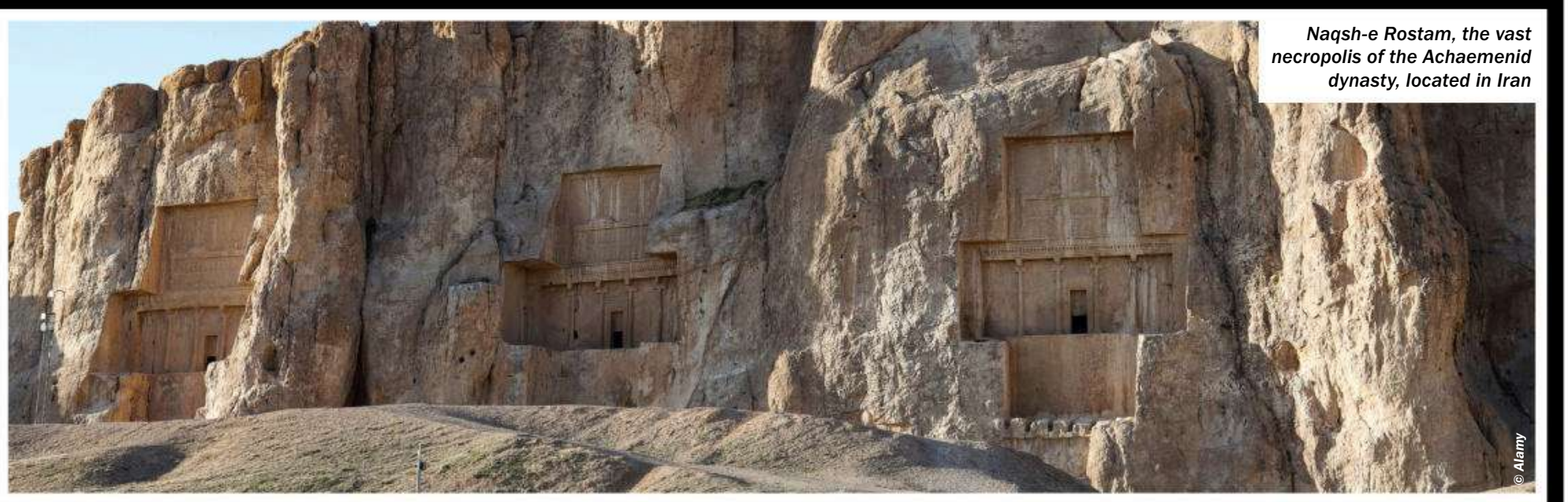



**"AT TIMES IT MAKES FOR CHALLENGING AND AFFECTING READING"**

The Achaemenid monarchs ruled over a territory that encompassed Egypt, Ethiopia and the Steppes of Asia. Structured in three parts, *Persians* adopts a clear framework for its exploration of this diverse, extensive empire. The first part is a narrative history, commencing with the rise of Cyrus the Great and the founding of the empire in 550 BCE. The second focuses more on questions of culture, society and identity. The third section returns to the earlier narrative, continuing to the conquests of Alexander the Great and the eventual fall of the largest empire of the ancient world. Each part brings to the fore engaging and compelling insights. There is, for instance, an interesting discussion of ancient language and enduring linguistic links. In addition, Llewellyn-Jones also explores the postal system and coinage, the latter being the first example of this in history.

Among the final pages of the book there is a guide to key figures, and the main text is supported by a number of illustrations. The list of texts for further reading also includes a short comment against each, and *Persians* will no doubt inspire many of its readers to explore more books on the subject once they've finished this one.

*Persians* is a wide-ranging and detailed examination of the lives of the Great Kings and the world in which they lived. It will naturally appeal to those interested in this subject in particular and the ancient world more generally. However, it also offers a compelling introduction to the period and will likely find a broader readership. **MJ**



*Naqsh-e Rostam, the vast necropolis of the Achaemenid dynasty, located in Iran*

© Alamy

5 BEST BOOKS ON

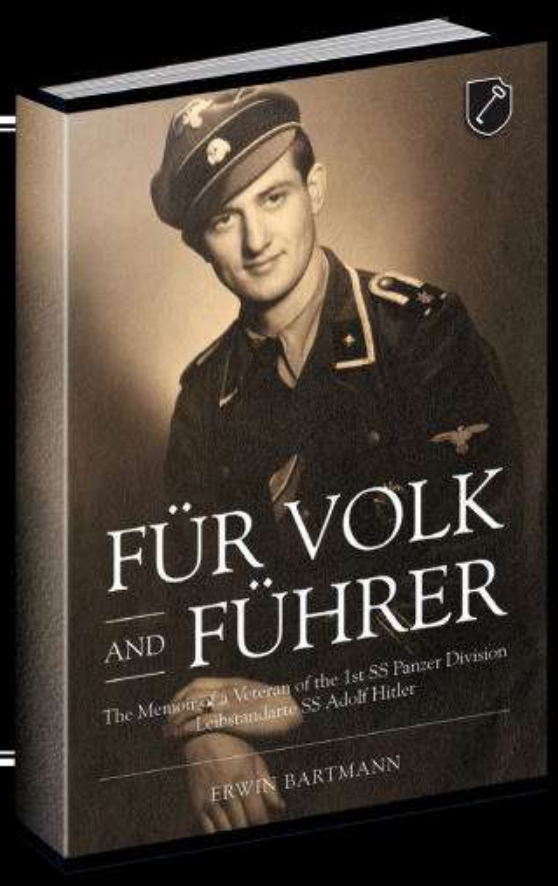
# LEIBSTANDARTE SS ADOLF HITLER

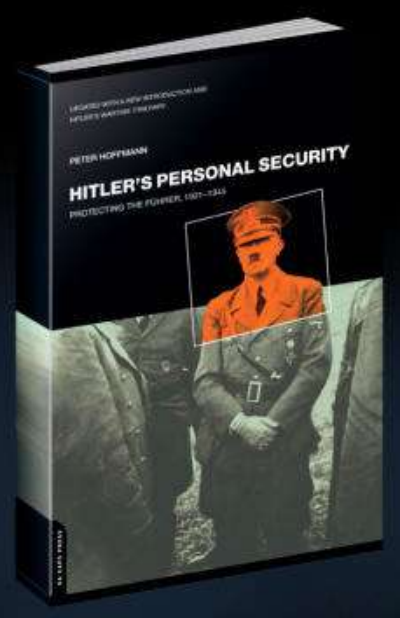
Evolving from the Führer's personal bodyguard into a heavily armed panzer division, the LSSAH included some of the most ardent Nazi zealots and was responsible for many atrocities in WWII

## FÜR VOLK AND FÜHRER

*Erwin Bartmann*

Subtitled *The Memoir of a Veteran of the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler*, Erwin Bartmann recounts his personal experiences serving with the division. It's a hugely detailed and valuable account of one soldier's experiences on the ground with the LSSAH, and while the narrative does not allow room for a broader or more thorough account of the division's war record, the book is ideal for those with sufficient base knowledge of the division's history.

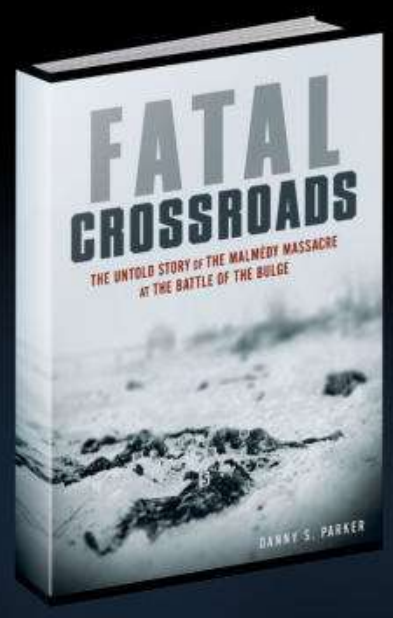



### Hitler's Personal Security: Protecting the Führer, 1921-1945

*Peter Hoffmann*

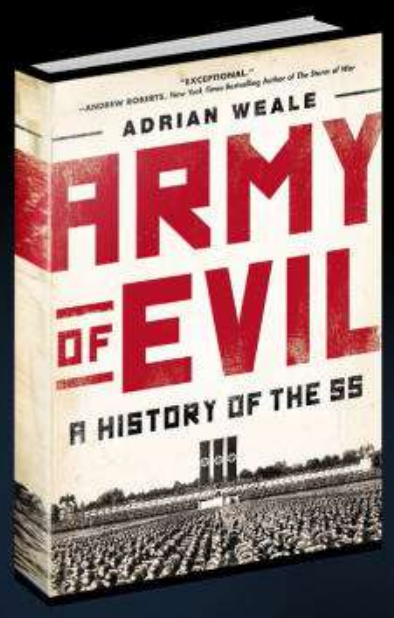
Detailing the LSSAH's first role before the outbreak of war, Hoffmann recounts the many challenges and close-calls faced by the men tasked with guarding Hitler. As well as the LSSAH, Hoffman describes the many rival security services and groups seeking to act as the Führer's trusted protectors. Also described are the surprisingly numerous assassination plots that almost succeeded.




### Fatal Crossroads

*Danny S Parker*

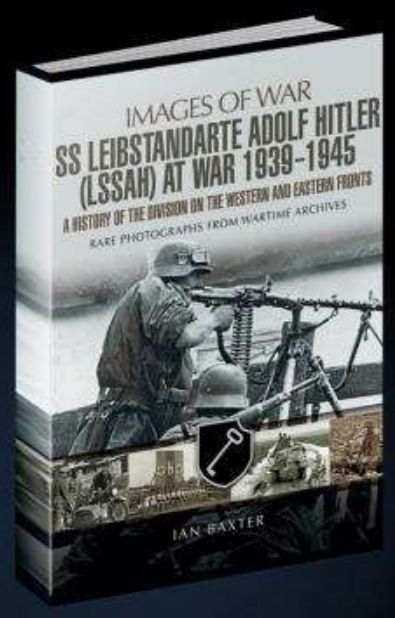
This thoroughly researched book recounts one of the most infamous war crimes of the LSSAH: the Malmedy Massacre, when 84 US prisoners of war were executed during the Battle of the Bulge. Using numerous first-hand accounts from both US and German witnesses, Parker unpacks the context for how the soldiers were captured, and the chilling details of this dark event.




### Army of Evil

*Adrian Weale*

This incredibly detailed history covers the origins, development and demise of the elite Nazi outfit. Weale also provides an insightful study of each facet of the Waffen-SS's organisation, recruitment and reorganisation, including how Nazi ideology formed the core of each of these. This provides a disturbing but wholly necessary context to the crimes and conduct of the SS divisions during WWII.


IMAGES OF WAR
SS LEIBSTANDARTE ADOLF HITLER (LSSAH) AT WAR 1939-1945
A HISTORY OF THE DIVISION ON THE WESTERN AND EASTERN FRONTS
RARE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM WARTIME ARCHIVES
IAN BAXTER

### SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler (LSSAH) at War 1939 – 1945

*Ian Baxter*

Telling the story of the division's wartime record through numerous photographs, this title also gives the reader an insight into the LSSAH's tactics and how it changed as the demands of the war grew and the division expanded. There are also numerous details on the division's changing equipment and various uniforms, giving the reader a broad overview of the division's history, ideal for those new to the topic.

# LOCATE BELOW TARGET. READ TARGET. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

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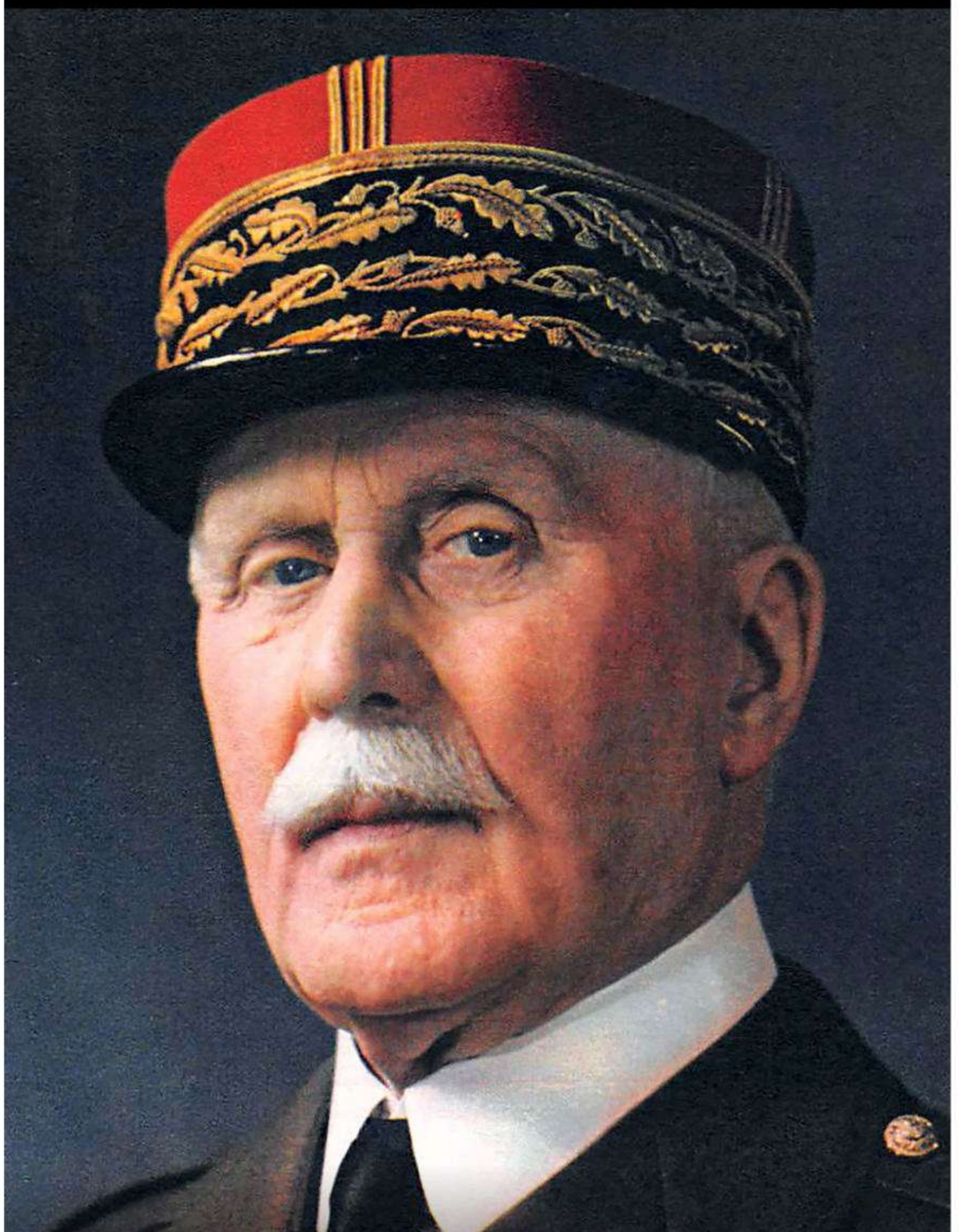

# HERO OF VERDUN OR VICHY TRAITOR?

## HOW PHILIPPE PÉTAIN DELIVERED FIRST WORLD WAR TRIUMPH, BUT BECAME AN AXIS COLLABORATOR

**ON SALE 17 MARCH**

*Images © Alamy*


HISTORY of WAR

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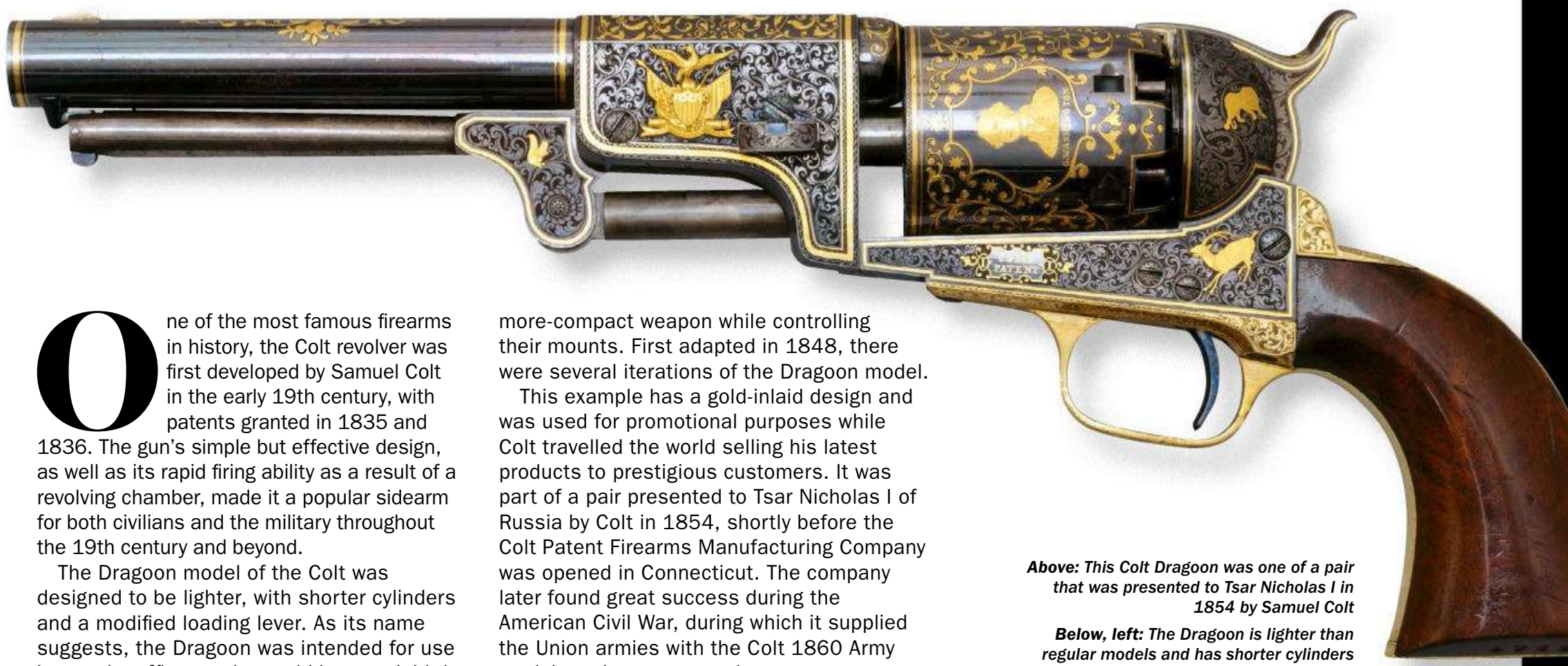
# COLT DRAGOON REVOLVER

## This modified version of the iconic sidearm was released in 1848 for use by cavalry officers




One of the most famous firearms in history, the Colt revolver was first developed by Samuel Colt in the early 19th century, with patents granted in 1835 and 1836. The gun's simple but effective design, as well as its rapid firing ability as a result of a revolving chamber, made it a popular sidearm for both civilians and the military throughout the 19th century and beyond.

The Dragoon model of the Colt was designed to be lighter, with shorter cylinders and a modified loading lever. As its name suggests, the Dragoon was intended for use by cavalry officers, who could better wield the more-compact weapon while controlling their mounts. First adapted in 1848, there were several iterations of the Dragoon model.

This example has a gold-inlaid design and was used for promotional purposes while Colt travelled the world selling his latest products to prestigious customers. It was part of a pair presented to Tsar Nicholas I of Russia by Colt in 1854, shortly before the Colt Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company was opened in Connecticut. The company later found great success during the American Civil War, during which it supplied the Union armies with the Colt 1860 Army model revolver, among other weapons.

***Above:** This Colt Dragoon was one of a pair that was presented to Tsar Nicholas I in 1854 by Samuel Colt*

***Below, left:** The Dragoon is lighter than regular models and has shorter cylinders and a modified loading lever*

*Images: Metropolitan Museum of Art*

**"THE COLT WAS A POPULAR SIDEARM FOR CIVILIANS AND THE MILITARY IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND BEYOND"**

THE MET

The Colt Dragoon revolver is part of the collections of the Department of Arms and Armor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. For more information visit:

**www.metmuseum.org**

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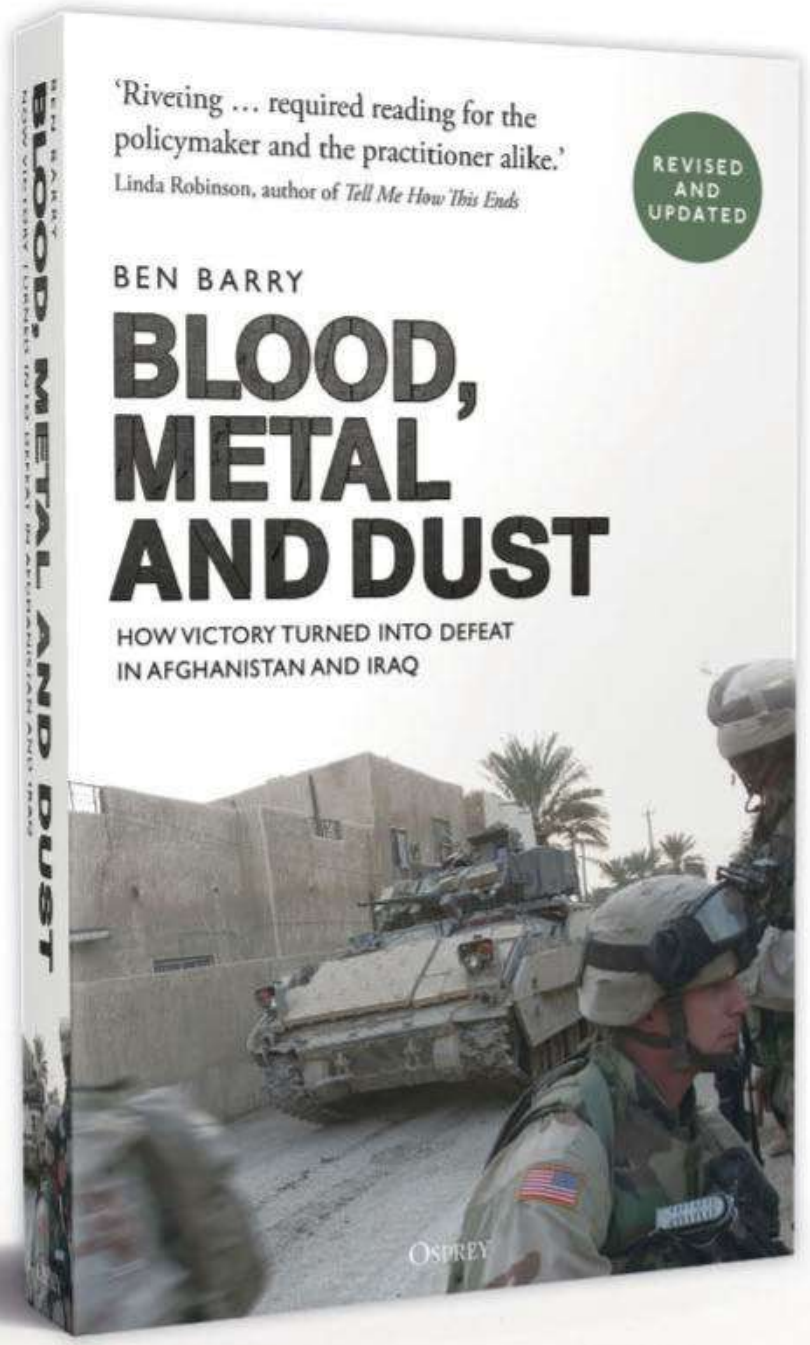
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